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# GREIFENSTEIN

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BY

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## CHAPTER XI

It is doubtful whether Greifenstein would have recognised his brother, if he had met him under any other circumstances. Forty years had passed since they had met, and both were old men. The difference between their ages was not great, for Greifenstein's father had died within the year of his son's birth, and his mother had married again three years later. In her turn she had died when both were young men, and from that time Greifenstein had seen little of his half-brother, who had been brought up by his own father in a different part of the country. Then young Rieseneck had entered the Prussian service, and a few years later had been ruined by the consequences of his evil deeds.

Greifenstein saw before him a tall man, with abundant white hair and a snowy beard, of bronzed complexion, evidently strong in spite of his years, chiefly remarkable for the heavy black eyebrows that shaded his small grey eyes. The latter were placed too near together, and the eyelids slanted downwards at the outer side, which gave the face an expression of intelligence and great cunning. Deep lines furrowed the high forehead, and descended in broad curves from beneath the eyes till they lost themselves in the beard. Kuno von Rieseneck was evidently a man of strong feelings and passions, of energetic temperament, clever, unscrupulous, but liable to go astray after strange ideas, and possibly capable of something very like fanaticism. It was indeed not credible that he should have done the deeds which had wrecked his life, out of cold calculation, and yet it was impossible to believe that he could be wholly disinterested in anything he did. The whole effect of his personality was disquieting.

He entered the room with slow steps,

keeping his eyes fixed upon his brother. The servant closed the door behind him, and the two men were alone. Rieseneck paused when he reached the middle of the apartment. For a moment his features moved a little uneasily, and then he spoke.

'Hugo, do you know me?'

'Yes,' answered Greifenstein, 'I know you very well.' He kept his hands behind him and did not change his position as he stood before the fire.

'You got my letter?' inquired the fugitive.

'Yes. I will do what you ask of me.'

The answers came in a hard, contemptuous voice, for Greifenstein was almost choking with rage at being thus forced to receive and protect a man whom he both despised and hated. But Rieseneck did not expect any very cordial welcome, and his expression did not vary.

'I thank you,' he answered. 'It is the only favour I ever asked of you, and I give you my word it shall be the last.'

Greifenstein's piercing eyes gleamed

dangerously, and for an instant the anger that burned in him glowed visibly in his face.

'Your——' He would have said 'your word,' throwing into the two syllables all the contempt he felt, for one whose word had been so broken. But he checked himself gallantly. In spite of all, Rieseneck was his guest and had come to him for protection, and he would not insult him. 'You shall be safe to-morrow night,' he said, controlling his tongue.

But Rieseneck had heard the first word, and knew what should have followed it. He turned a little pale, bronzed though he was, and he let his hand rest upon the back of a chair beside him.

'I will not trouble you further,' he said. 'If you will show me a place where I can sleep, I will be ready in the morning.'

'No,' answered Greifenstein. 'That will not do. The servants know that a visitor is in the house. They will expect to see you at dinner. Besides, you are probably hungry.'

Perhaps he regretted having shown his brother, even by the suggestion of a phrase, what was really in his heart, and the feeling of the ancient guest-right made him relent a little.

'Sit down,' he added, as Rieseneck seemed to hesitate. 'It will be necessary that you dine with us and meet my wife. We must not excite suspicion.'

'You are married then?' said Rieseneck. It was more like a thoughtful reflection than a question. Though he had written to his brother more than once, the latter's answers, when he vouchsafed any, had been curt and businesslike in the extreme.

'I have been married five and twenty years,' Greifenstein replied. It was strange to be informing his brother of the fact.

Rieseneck sat down upon a high chair and rested his elbow upon the table. Neither spoke for a long time, but Greifenstein resumed his seat, relighted his pipe, and placed his feet upon the fender, taking precisely the attitude in which he had been when his brother was announced. The

situation was almost intolerable, but his habits helped him to bear it.

'I was also married,' said Rieseneck at last, in a low voice, as though speaking to himself. 'You never saw my wife?' he asked rather suddenly.

'No.'

'She died,' continued the other. 'It was very long ago—more than thirty years.'

'Indeed,' said Greifenstein, as though he cared very little to hear more.

Again there was silence in the room, broken only by the crackling of the fir logs in the fire and by the ticking of the clock in its tall carved case in the corner. A full hour must elapse before the evening meal, and Greifenstein did not know what to do with his unwelcome guest. At last the latter took out a black South American cigar and lit it. For a few moments he smoked thoughtfully, and then, as though the fragrant fumes had the power to unloose his tongue, he again began to talk.

'She died,' he said. 'She ruined me. Yes, did you never hear how it was? And

yet I loved her. She would not follow me. Then they sent me some of her hair and the boy. But for her, it might never have happened, and yet I forgive her. You never heard how it all happened?'

'I never inquired,' answered Greifenstein. 'You say she ruined you. How do you mean?'

'She made me do it. She was an enthusiast for liberty and revolution. She filled my mind with ideas of the people's sovereignty. She talked of nothing else. She besought me on her knees to join her party, as she called it. She flattered me with dreams of greatness in a great republic, she illuminated crime in the light of heroism, she pushed me into secret societies, and laughed at me for my want of courage. I loved her, and she made a fool of me, worse than a fool, a traitor, worse than a traitor, a murderer, for she persuaded me to give the arms to the mob, she made me an outlaw, an exile, an object of hatred to my countrymen, a thing loathsome to all who knew me. And yet I

loved her, even when it was all over, and I would have given my soul to have her with me.'

Greifenstein's face expressed unutterable contempt for this man, who in the strength and pride of youth had laid down his honour for a woman's word, not even for her love, since he had possessed that already.

'It seems to me,' he said, 'that there was one very simple remedy for you.'

'A little lead in the right place. I know. And yet I lived, and I live still. Why? I do not know. I believed in the revolution, though she had forced the belief upon me, and I continued to believe in it until long after I went to South America. And when I had ceased to believe in it, no one cared whether I lived or died. Then came this hope, and this blow. I could almost do it now.'

Greifenstein looked at him curiously for a moment, and then rose from his place and went deliberately to a huge, dark piece of furniture that stood between the windows.

He brought back a polished mahogany case, unlocked it and set it beside his brother upon the table, under the light of the lamp.

Rieseneck knew what he meant well enough, but he did not wince. On the contrary he opened the case and looked at the beautiful weapon, as it lay all loaded and ready for use in its bed of green baize cloth. Then he laid it on the table again, and pushed it a little away from him.

'Not now,' he said quietly. 'I am in your house. You would have to declare my identity. It would make a scandal. I will not do it.'

'You had better put it into your pocket,' answered Greifenstein grimly, but without a trace of unkindness in his voice. 'You may like to have it about you, you know.'

Rieseneck looked at his brother in silence for a few seconds, and then took the thing once more in his hands.

'Do you mean it as a gift?' he asked. 'You might not care to claim it afterwards.'

'Yes.'

'I thank you.' He took the revolver from the case, examined it attentively and then slipped it into his breast-pocket. 'I thank you,' he repeated. 'I do not possess one.'

Greifenstein wondered whether Rieseneck would have the courage to act upon the suggestion. To him there was nothing horrible in the idea. He was merely offering this despicable creature the means of escape from the world's contempt. He himself, in such a case, would have taken his own life long ago, and he could not understand that any man should hesitate when the proper course lay so very clear before him. He went back to his seat as if nothing unusual had happened. Then, as though to turn the conversation, he began to speak of the plans for the morrow. He did not really believe in his brother's intentions, but as an honourable man, according to his lights, he considered that he had done his duty in giving the weapon.

'We can ride a long distance,' he said,

'and then we can walk. When you are once at the lake, you can find a boat which will take you over. I warn you that it is far.'

'It will be enough if you show me the way,' answered Rieseneck absently. 'You are very kind.'

'It is my interest,' said Greifenstein, unwilling that his feelings should be misinterpreted. Then he relapsed into silence.

Of the two, Rieseneck was the more at his ease. Possibly he did not realise how his brother despised him. Moreover, he had associated during many years with people of many nations, and he did not feel at once that his brother was so very different from these, or so very differently situated towards him. His mind, too, was somewhat unbalanced by the shock he had lately received, and his attention was concentrated upon himself rather than upon the things and persons he saw. During the greater part of his life he had made use of his acute intelligence in his dealings with the world, and under any other circum-

stances he would in all likelihood have made a determined effort to gain his brother's sympathy. But in the refusal of his application for a pardon he had believed certain, he had suffered a severe blow. Deep in his tortuous nature there existed at least one sincere and good quality, which was his passionate love for his native country. It had been distorted indeed, through the influence of another strong affection, the love for his wife while she had lived, and, being misdirected by her agency, the very strength of his patriotism had been the chief cause of his ruin. Now, however, forty years of exile had effaced all belief in parties or in the efficacy of revolutionary change, and had left him nothing but the original love of his native land, for itself, as it was, or as it might be, were it empire, kingdom, or republic. What did it matter, whether Germany were subject to one form of government or to another? Time had softened his hatreds and had spread its dim mantle over his own disgrace, while it had exalted his beloved

nation among all the nations of the earth. Germany's victories, Germany's unity, the glory of her imperial race, the pride of her iron statesmen, the untold possibilities of her future existence, all were his, as they belonged to every born German by right, to share in and to rejoice over with all his heart. For forty years he had dreamed of returning, if it were only to live under an unknown name in some quiet hamlet, if it were merely for the sake of feeling that he was like a nameless drop of the blood that flowed in his country's veins. He asked nothing but the permission to end his life upon the soil whereon he had been born. Few years remained to him, and he could have done no harm, even had he wished it. His request had been refused, as Greifenstein had foreseen that it must be, on the ground that he was not a political delinquent, but a military criminal, on the plea that the forgiveness of such a misdeed would be contrary to all precedent, and would constitute a very bad example. Those unbending principles by which

Germany had risen to her high place would not yield a hair's-breadth for all the supplications of a man who had betrayed his trust, though he were old and broken down, harmless, and even, perhaps, somewhat to be pitied. The law was not made for the young rather than for the aged ; it was the same for all, unchangingly just and pitilessly conscientious.

But Rieseneck had suffered in the one tender spot that remained in his heart, and the wound had deadened his sensibilities in all other respects, while it had slightly disturbed the balance of his faculties. It is hard to believe that he would have spoken of his dead wife as he did, if he had realised exactly what Greifenstein felt towards him. The sufferings of the last week had revived in him the memories of long ago, and he had talked almost against his will of what was in his mind.

He sat silently by the table, and finished his cigar. As he threw away the stump that remained, Greifenstein looked at the clock and laid down his pipe.

'We dine in a quarter of an hour,' he observed, rising to his feet. Rieseneck rose, too, and spread his broad thin hands to the blaze of the fire.

'There is a room here which is conveniently situated for you,' said Greifenstein opening a door, and then striking a match to show the way. He lighted the candles upon the dressing-table and turned to his brother. Rieseneck was looking at him with a singularly disagreeable expression, which Greifenstein could not understand.

The simple action had roused the exile's hatred and jealousy. During the last hour he had thought little of where he was; now he suddenly realised the extent of what he had forfeited. There was nothing especial, in the simply furnished bedroom, to account for his feelings. The thought that hurt him embraced far more than that. He saw his brother rich, honourable, respected, living in his ancestral home, in his own country and possessing a full right to all he enjoyed. He did not know that there were rarely guests in Greifenstein; he only saw how natural it

was that they should come, and he hated his brother for his power to live as his fathers had lived before him, and to entertain whom he pleased under his own roof. He thought bitterly of his own beautiful home in Chili, for his affairs had prospered in his exile, and he had lived in a princely fashion. He had lacked nothing for many a long year, saving only the right to build his home upon an acre of German ground. But that he could not have, and that he envied his brother with all his heart. Greifenstein, however, paid no attention to the angry light in Rieseneck's eyes.

'You will find the room convenient,' he said. 'You can lock your door, and if there should be any pursuit and the police should come here you have only to go through that press. There is a door in the back of it. Look.'

He opened the panel and held the light forward into the dark way beyond.

'Where does that lead to?' inquired Rieseneck.

'To a small room in the thickness of the

main wall. Thence a winding stair descends to a passage. Follow that and you will come out in the Hunger-Thurm.'

Such devices are common in buildings of the old time in Germany, and Rieseneck manifested no surprise. He only nodded gravely. Greifenstein closed the panel and then left him alone. Rieseneck, however, determined that before going to rest he would follow the passage to the end and ascertain whether it really afforded a means of escape, or whether his brother had contrived a trap for him. In the meanwhile the ordeal of dinner was before him, and it was necessary that he should assume the part of the visitor, lest Greifenstein's wife should suspect anything. He wondered vaguely what sort of woman she was and whether she knew of his existence.

Greifenstein took the precaution of sending word to his wife that there was a visitor in the castle. In her nervous state he feared lest the sudden appearance of a stranger might agitate her, and although he had long abandoned the idea that she knew anything

of Rieseneck, his cautious mind admitted the pure possibility of their having been previously acquainted. Even in that extreme case, however, he could not believe a recognition probable, for he himself would certainly not have known Rieseneck, nor admitted that the bearded old man was the person from whom he had parted forty years before. Greifenstein's chief thought was to get the man away and out of the country without any unpleasant incident, and in order to accomplish his purpose he forced himself to behave in his usual manner. After all, twenty-four hours would settle the matter, and the first of the twenty-four was already passed.

When Clara heard that there was to be a guest at dinner, her first sensation was one of extreme terror, but she was reassured by the information her maid gave concerning the general appearance of Herr Brandt. The woman had not seen him, but had of course heard at once a full description of his personality. He was described as a tall old gentleman, exceedingly well dressed, though

he had arrived on foot and without luggage. The maid supposed that his effects would follow him, since he had chosen to walk. Beyond that, Clara could ascertain nothing, but it was clear that she did not consider the details she learned as descriptive of the person whose coming she feared. On the contrary, the prospect of a little change from the usual monotony of the evening had the effect of exhilarating her spirits, and she bestowed even more attention than usual upon the adornment of her thin person. The nature of the woman could not die. Her natural vanity was so extraordinary that it might have been expected to survive death itself. She belonged to that strange class of people who foresee even the effect they will produce when they are dead, who leave elaborate directions for the disposal of their bodies in the most becoming manner, and who build for themselves appropriate tombs while they are alive, decorated in a style agreeable to their tastes. Clara arrayed herself in all her glory for the feast; she twisted the ringlets of her abundant

faded hair, until each covered at least one obnoxious line of forehead and temples; she laid the delicate colour upon her sunken cheeks with amazing precision, and shaded it artistically with the soft hare's foot, till it was blended with the whiteness of the adjacent pearl powder; she touched the colourless eyebrows with the pointed black stick of cosmetic that lay ready to her hand in its small silver case, and made her yellow nails shine with pink paste and doeskin rubbers till they reflected the candlelight like polished horn. With the utmost care she adjusted the rare old lace to hide the sinewy lines of her emaciated throat, and then, observing the effect as her maid held a second mirror beside her face, she hastened to touch the shrivelled lobes of her ears with a delicate rose colour that set off the brilliancy of the single diamonds she wore as earrings. She opened and shut her eyelids quickly to make her eyes brighter, and held up her hands so that the blood should leave the raised network of the purple veins less swollen and apparent. The patient

tire-woman gave one last scrutinising glance and adjusted the rich folds of the silk gown with considerable art, although such taste as she possessed was outraged at the effect of the pale straw colour when worn by such an aged beauty. Another look into the tall mirror, and Clara von Greifenstein was satisfied. She had done what she could do to beautify herself, to revive in her own eyes some faint memory of that prettiness she had once seen reflected in her glass, and she believed that she had not altogether failed. She even smiled contentedly at her maid, before she left the chamber to go to the drawing-room. It was a satisfaction to show herself to some one, it was a relief from the thoughts that had tormented her so long, it was a respite from her husband's perpetual effort to amuse her by reading aloud. For a few hours at least she was to hear the sound of an unfamiliar voice, to enjoy the refreshing effect of a slight motion in the stagnant pool of worn-out ideas that surrounded her little island of life.

She drew herself up and walked delicately,

as she went into the drawing-room. She had judged that her entrance would be effective, and had timed her coming so as to be sure that her husband and Herr Brandt should be there before her. The room looked just as it usually did; it was luxurious, large, warm and softly lighted. Clara almost forgot her age so far as to wish that there had been more lamps, though the shade was undeniably advantageous to her looks. She came forward, and saw that the two men were standing together before the fire. The door had moved noiselessly on its hinges, but the rustle of the silk gown made Greifenstein and Rieseneck turn their heads simultaneously. Clara's eyes rested on the stranger with some curiosity, and she noticed with satisfaction that his gaze fixed itself upon her own face. He was evidently impressed by her appearance, and her vain old heart fluttered pleasantly.

'Permit me to present Herr Brandt,' said Greifenstein, making a step forward.

Clara inclined her head with an expression that was intended to be affable, and Riese-

neck bowed gravely. She sank into a chair and looking up, saw that he was watching her with evident interest. It struck her that he was a very pale man, and though she had at first been pleased by his stare, she began to feel uncomfortable, as it continued.

'You are old friends, I suppose,' she remarked, glancing at her husband with a smile.

Both men bent their heads in assent.

'I had the honour of knowing Herr von Greifenstein when we were both very young,' said Rieseneck after a pause that had threatened to be awkward.

'Indeed? And you have not met for a long time! How very strange! But life is full of such things, you know!' she laughed nervously.

While she was speaking, the intonations of Rieseneck's voice seemed to be still ringing in her ears, and the vibrations touched a chord of her memory very painfully, so that she forgot what she was saying and hid her confusion in a laugh. Greifenstein was

staring at the ceiling and did not see his brother start and steady himself against the chimney-piece.

At that moment dinner was announced. Clara rose with an effort from her seat, and stood still. She supposed that Herr Brandt would offer her his arm, but he did not move from his place. Greifenstein said nothing. A violent conflict arose in his mind and made him hesitate. He could not bear the idea of seeing his wife touch even the sleeve of the man he so despised, and yet he dreaded lest any exhibition of his feelings should make Clara suspicious. The last consideration outweighed everything else.

'Will you give my wife your arm?' he said, addressing Rieseneck very coldly.

There was no choice, and the tall old man went to Clara's side, and led her out of the room, while Greifenstein followed alone. They sat down to the round table, which was laden with heavy plate and curious pieces of old German silver, and was illuminated by a hanging lamp. A hundred

persons might have dined in the room, and the shadows made the panelled walls seem even further from the centre than they really were. Vast trophies of skulls and antlers and boars' heads loomed up in the distance, indistinctly visible through the dim shade, but lighted up occasionally by the sudden flare of the logs from the wide hearth. The flashes of flame made the stags' skulls seem to grin horribly and gleamed strangely upon the white tusks that protruded from the black boars' heads, and reflected a deep red glare from their artificial eyes of coloured glass. The servants stepped noiselessly upon the dark carpet, while the three persons who shared the solemn banquet sat silently in their places, pretending to partake of the food that was placed before them.

The meal was a horrible farce. There was something sombrely contemptible to each one in the idea of being forced into the pretence of eating, for the sake of the hired attendants who carried the dishes. For the first time in his life Greifenstein's hardy nature was

disgusted by the sight of food. Rieseneck sat erect in his chair, from time to time swallowing a glass of strong wine, and looking from Clara's face to the fork he held in his hand. She herself exercised a woman's privilege and refused everything, staring consistently at the monumental silver ornament in the midst of the table. When she looked up, Rieseneck's white face scared her. She had no need to see it now, for she knew who he was better than any one, better than Greifenstein himself. That power whose presence she had once felt, when alone with her husband, was not with her now. A deadly fear overcame every other instinct save that of self-preservation. She struggled to maintain her place at the table, to control the shriek of horror that was on her lips, as she had struggled to produce that feigned laugh ten days ago, with all her might. But the protracted strain was almost more than she could bear, and she felt that her exhausted nerves might leave her helpless at any moment. She had read in books vivid descriptions of the agony

of death, but she had never fancied that it could be so horrible as this, so long drawn out, so overwhelmingly bitter.

In truth, a more fearful ordeal could not be imagined than was imposed by a relentless destiny upon this miserable, painted, curled and jewelled old woman as she sat at the head of her own table. It would have been easier for her, had she known that she was to meet him. It would have been far less hard, if she had lived her life in the whirl of the world, where we are daily forced to look our misdeeds in the face and to meet with smiling indifference those who know our past and have themselves been a part of it. Even a quarter of an hour for preparation would have been better than this gradual recognition, in which each minute made certainty more positive. There was but one ray of consolation or hope for her, and she tried to make the most of it. He had come because he had failed to obtain his pardon, and his brother was helping him to leave the country quietly. She was as sure of it, as though she had been acquainted

with all the details. To-morrow he would be gone, and once gone he would never return, and her last years would be free from fear. The fact that he came under a false name showed that she was right. In an hour she could excuse herself and go to her room, never to see his face again. Her hands grasped and crushed the damask of the cloth beneath the table, as she tried to steady her nerves by contemplating her near deliverance from torture.

Greifenstein was the bravest of the three, as he had also the least cause for anxiety. He saw that it was impossible to continue the meal in total silence, and he made a tremendous effort to produce a show of conversation.

'There has been much snow this year, Herr Brandt,' he said, raising his head and addressing his brother.

Rieseneck did not understand, but he heard Greifenstein's voice, and slowly turned his ghastly face towards him.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'I did not quite hear.'

'There has been much snow this year,' Greifenstein repeated with forcible distinctness.

'Yes,' replied his brother, 'it seems so.'

'After all, it is nearly Christmas,' said Clara, trembling in every limb at the sound of her own voice.

Only an hour more to bear, and she would be safe for ever. Only another effort and Greifenstein would suspect nothing. Rieseneck looked mechanically at his brother, as though he were trying to find something to say. In reality he was almost insensible, and he hardly knew why he did not fall from his chair. A servant brought another dish and Clara helped herself unconsciously. The man went on to Rieseneck, and waited patiently until the latter should turn his head and see what was offered to him.

Clara saw an opportunity of speaking again. She could call his attention by addressing him. One, two, three seconds passed, and then she spoke. It would be enough to utter his name, so that he should look round and see the attendant at his

elbow. 'Herr Brandt'—the two syllables were short and simple enough.

'Herr von Rieseneck,' she said quietly.

In the extremity of her nervousness, her brain had become suddenly confused and she was lost.

## CHAPTER XII

As the words escaped Clara's lips, Greifenstein started violently and made as though he would rise, laying his hands on the edge of the table and leaning forward towards his wife. The echo of Rieseneck's name had not died away when the unhappy woman realised what she had done. Rieseneck himself turned suddenly towards her and the blood rushed to his pale face. Clara's head fell forward and she covered her eyes with her hands, uttering a short, sharp cry like that of an animal mortally wounded. The servant stood still at Rieseneck's side, staring stupidly from one to the other. Fully ten seconds elapsed before Greifenstein recovered his presence of mind.

'You are ill, Clara,' he said in a choking voice. 'I will take you to your room.'

He did not understand the situation, and he could not guess how his wife had learned that the visitor was not Herr Brandt but Kuno von Rieseneck. But he was horrified by the thought that she should have made the discovery, and his first idea was to get her away as soon as possible. He came to her side, and saw that she was helpless, if not insensible. Then he lifted her from her chair and carried her through the wide door and the small apartment beyond into the drawing-room. Rieseneck followed at a distance.

'You can go,' said Greifenstein to the servant. 'We shall not want any more dinner to-night.'

The man went out and left the three together. Clara lay upon a great divan, her husband standing at her side, and Rieseneck at her feet. Her eyes were open, but they were glassy with terror, though she was quite conscious.

'Clara—are you better?' asked Greifenstein anxiously.

She gasped for breath and seemed unable to speak. Greifenstein looked at his brother.

'I cannot imagine how she knew your name,' he said. 'Did you know her before?'

Rieseneck had turned white again and stood twisting his fingers as though in some terrible distress. Greifenstein had not noticed his manner before, and gazed at him now in considerable surprise. He fancied that Rieseneck feared discovery and danger to himself.

'What is the matter?' he asked impatiently. 'You are safe enough yet——'

While he spoke Clara endeavoured to rise, supporting herself upon one hand, and staring wildly at Rieseneck. The presentiment of a great unknown evil came upon Greifenstein, and he laid his hand heavily upon his brother's arm.

'What is the meaning of this?' he asked sternly. 'Do you know each other?'

The words roused Rieseneck. He drew

back from his brother's touch and answered in a broken voice :

'Let me go. Let me leave this house ——'

'No!' exclaimed the other firmly. 'You shall not go yet.'

Again he grasped Rieseneck's arm, this time with no intention of relinquishing his hold.

'Let him go, Hugo!' gasped Clara. She struggled to her feet and tried to unloose the iron grip of her husband's fingers, straining her weak hands in the useless attempt. 'Let him go!' she repeated frantically. 'For God's sake let him go!'

'What is he to you?' asked Greifenstein. Then, as though he guessed some fearful answer to his question he repeated it in a fiercer tone. 'What is he to you? And what are you to her?' he cried, facing his brother as he shook him by the arm.

'You have cause to be angry,' said Rieseneck. And so have I.' He fixed his eyes on Clara's, and something like a smile flitted over his features.

'Speak!' commanded Greifenstein, to whom the suspense was becoming unbearable.

Clara saw that Rieseneck was about to utter the fatal words, and with a last remnant of energy she made a desperate attempt to cover his mouth with her hand. But she was too late.

'This woman is my wife, not yours!' he cried in ringing tones.

In an instant Greifenstein thrust his brother from him, so that he reeled back against the wall.

'Liar!' he almost yelled.

Clara fell upon the floor between the two men, a shapeless heap of finery. Rieseneck looked his brother in the face and answered the insult calmly. From the moment when he had recognised Clara, he had felt that he must see the whole horror of her fall with his own eyes in order to be avenged for his wrongs.

'I told you my wife was dead,' he said slowly. 'I believed it. She is alive. She has lived to ruin you as she ruined me.

Clara von Rieseneck—that is your name—stand upon your feet—lift up your infamous face, and own your lawful husband!'

Even then Clara might have saved herself. One vigorous protest, and Greifenstein would without doubt have slain his brother with his hands. But she had not the strength left to speak the strong lie. She dragged herself to her accuser's feet and threw her arms about his knees.

'Mercy!' she could not utter any other word.

'You see,' said Rieseneck. 'She is alive, she knows me!'

'Mercy!' groaned the wretched creature, fawning upon him with her wasted hands.

'Down, beast!' answered the tall old man with savage contempt. 'There is no mercy for such as you.'

Greifenstein had stood still for some seconds, overcome by the horror of his shame. One glance told him that his brother had spoken the truth. He turned away and stood facing the empty room. His face was convulsed, his teeth ground

upon each other, his hands were clenched as in the agony of death. From his straining eyes great tears rolled down his grey cheeks, the first and the last that he ever shed. And yet by that strange instinct of his character which abhorred all manifestation of emotion, he stood erect and motionless, as a soldier on parade. The death-blow had struck him, but he must die on his feet.

Then after a long pause, broken only by Clara's incoherent groans and sobs, he heard Rieseneck's footstep behind him, and then his brother's voice, calling him by his name.

'Hugo—what has this woman deserved?'

'Death,' answered Greifenstein solemnly.

'She helped to ruin me through my faults, she has ruined you through no fault of yours. She must die.'

'She must die,' repeated Greifenstein.

'She has given you a son who is nameless. She cast off the son she bore to me because through me his name was infamous. She must pay the penalty.'

'She must die.'

Greifenstein did not turn round even then. He crossed the room to the chimney-piece and laid his two hands upon it. Still he heard his brother's voice, though the words were no longer addressed to him.

'Clara von Rieseneck, your hour has come.'

'Mercy, Kuno! For God's sake——'

'There is no mercy. Confess your crime. The time is short.'

The wretched old woman tried to rise, but Rieseneck's hand kept her upon her knees.

'You shall do me this justice before you go,' he said. 'Repeat your misdeeds after me. You, Clara Kurtz, were married to me in the year eighteen hundred and forty-seven.'

'Yes — it is true,' answered the poor creature in broken tones.

'Say it! You shall say the words!'

Her teeth chattered. Transfixed by fear, her lips moved mechanically.

'I, Clara Kurtz, was married to you, in the year eighteen hundred and forty-seven.'

The woman's incredible vanity survived everything. Her voice sank to a whisper at the two last words of the date, for Greifenstein had never known her real age.

'You caused me to betray the arsenal,' continued Rieseneck inexorably.

'I did.'

'You abandoned me when I was in prison. When I escaped you refused to follow me. You sent me false news of your death, with a lock of your hair and the child.'

Clara repeated each word, like a person hypnotised and subject to the will of another.

'Then you must have changed your name.'

'I changed my name.'

'And you induced Hugo von Greifenstein to marry you, knowing that he was my brother and that I was alive. I had often told you of him.'

Clara made the statement in the words dictated.

'And now you are to die, and may the Lord have mercy upon your sinful soul.'

'And now I am to die. May the Lord have mercy upon my sinful soul.'

Released from the stern command of her judge, Clara uttered a low cry and fell upon her face at his feet.

'You have heard,' said Rieseneck to his brother. 'It is time.'

Greifenstein turned. He saw the tall old man's great figure standing flat against the opposite wall, and he saw the ghastly face, half hidden by the snowy beard. He glanced down, and beheld a mass of straw-coloured silk, crumpled and disordered, and just beyond it a coil of faded hair adorned with jewelled pins that reflected the soft light. He crossed the room, and his features were ashy pale, firmly set and utterly relentless. He had heard her condemnation from her own lips, he thought of his son, nameless through this woman's crime, and his heart was hardened.

'It is time,' he said. 'Have you anything more to say?'

He waited for an answer, but none came. Clara's hour had struck and she knew it. There was deep silence in the room. Then the stillness was broken by a gasp for breath and by a little rustling of the delicate silk. That was all.

When it was done, the two brothers stooped down again and lifted their burden and bore it silently away, till they reached the room in which they had first met. Then Greifenstein made sign that they should go further and they entered the chamber beyond, and upon the bed that was there, they laid down the dead woman, and covered her poor painted face decently with a sheet and went away, closing the door softly behind them.

For a moment they stood looking at each other earnestly. Then Rieseneck took from his pocket his brother's gift and laid it upon the table.

'It is time for us also,' he said.

'Yes. I must write to Greif first.'

Half an hour later the short and terrible tragedy was completed, and of the three

persons who had sat together at the table, suffering each in his or her own way as much as each could bear, not one was left alive to tell the tale.

Outside the house of death, the silent, spotless snow gleamed in the light of the waning moon. Not a breath of wind sighed amongst the stately black trees. Only, far below, the tumbling torrent roared through its half-frozen bed, and high above, from the summit of the battlement that had sheltered so many generations of Greifensteins from danger in war, and in peace from the bitter north wind, the great horned owls sent forth their melancholy note, from time to time, and opened wide their cruel hungry eyes, as the dismal sound echoed away among the dark firs.

Then all was confusion in an instant, within and without. Lights flashed out over the snow from the deep, low gateway, voices rang in accents of alarm through the halls and spacious corridors, huge watch-dogs sprang to the length of their rattling chains and bellowed out their deep-

mouthed cries, the shrieks of frightened women rose high above the noise and were drowned again by the loud bass voices of excited serving-men. Then there was the clatter of iron shoes upon the stone pavements as the startled horses were led out into the moonlight from their warm dark stalls, the tinkle of curb chains, the wheeze of tightening leather girths, the clicking of curb and snaffle between champing teeth, the purselike chink of spurs on booted heels, the soft dull thud of riders springing into saddles. The iron-studded gates creaked back upon their huge hinges, as the burly porter, pale with fear, dragged open the heavy oak panels. Lanterns flashed, stable-boys and house servants elbowed each other in the narrow way and flattened themselves against the damp stone walls, as they heard the tramp of the approaching feet. Then four strong horses trotted out, two and two, into the moonlight beyond, each bearing on his back a messenger of the terrible tidings, and all breaking into a brisk gallop as the party

disappeared in the mottled black and white distance under the mighty trees. One rode for Sigmundskron, and one for the nearest surgeon, one for the distant town, and one to bear the ghastly tale to Greif himself, the nameless orphan, who at that moment was marching sword in hand beside the tall standard of his Korps, at the head of a thousand students, in all the magnificence of his fantastic dress, leading the great torchlight procession which closed the academic year, and which crowned with a splendid revelry the last act of his student life. As he strode along, proud, successful, popular, the envy of all his fellows, the idol of his Korps companions, pale-faced servants were laying the body of his father beside his dead mother in the state chamber of Greifenstein, and frightened menials were trembling under the weight of the tall dead man whose snowy beard blew about in such fantastic waves before the draught of every opened door. As he went up the steps of the festal drinking-hall wherein the last students' feast of the year was to be cele-

brated, and over which he himself was to preside, three women were met together in distant Sigmundskron, repeating the service for the dead, before the smouldering embers of their poor fire, by the dim light of their one smoking candle. An hour later, as the orchestra thundered out the strains of the soul-stirring Landesvater, sustaining but not covering the glorious chorus of a thousand fresh young voices, a grey-haired woman in a dark cloak was riding slowly through the snowy ways of the dismal forest, her horse led carefully by the booted groom who had brought the news. Her face was paler than ever it was wont to be, but not less brave. Her well-worn mantle was no fit covering against the bitter Christmas air, but her heart was not cold within. She knew that Greif would come in the morning, or at noontime, and cost what it might, she would not let him face his awful sorrow alone, or feel that none but a hired hand had smoothed his dead mother's faded hair, or closed his dead father's staring eyes. She did what she could. She sat as she might

upon the man's saddle, and she faced the cruel cold unflinchingly, encouraging the fellow who led her horse with such words and promises as she was able to devise.

But the distance was great, the snow was deep, and the stout Mecklenburger roan had breasted the steep road at a gallop only an hour before. The castle clock was striking half-past four when the strong-hearted Lady of Sigmundskron was lifted from her seat to the pavement within the walls of Greifenstein, half dead with cold, and horrified at the thought of what she had come to see, but calm, determined and full of dignity as only women, and such women, can be, in the presence of a horrible catastrophe. She took what they offered her, a glass of strong wine and a slice of venison, scarcely cold from the ghastly meal that had preceded the tragedy. She did not suffer herself to think whence it came, for she needed strength, not only to do her duty, but to impose order and quiet in the terrified household. Then she listened to the story and visited the rooms. There were police-

men in the house, quiet men in dark uniforms with great yellow beards and grave faces, and there was the surgeon, an insignificant country leech in spectacles, who would have been pompous anywhere else and at any other time, but who looked singularly helpless and subdued. Other officials would doubtless come in the course of the early morning, to report upon what had happened, but now that there was a responsible person present, a relation of the dead and one in authority, no great difficulty could arise. One thing only Frau von Sigmundskron had not understood, and that involved the understanding of all the rest. She did not know who the stranger was, whose coming seemed to have led to the final catastrophe. She guessed indeed that he must be Rieseneck, but there was no evidence of his identity. It was not until she had been three hours in the house that she extracted from one of the servants an account of what had occurred before the three had so suddenly left the dinner-table. The man remembered having been told that

the visitor was Herr Brandt, but his mistress, when he was waiting at the guest's side, had certainly called him by another name. It was 'von Riesen'—— and something more. The servant was sure of that, and the baroness was satisfied. She did not care to tell him what the name really was, for she began to see dimly that the triple murder and suicide were in some way the result of the exile's coming. Nothing had been found, not a scrap of writing to give an explanation, not a sign to indicate a clue. The surgeon's evidence was simple. The lady had been strangled, the two gentlemen had shot themselves. Nothing showed that there had been any struggle. Greifenstein and his guest had been found in two chairs, each having in his hand a revolver of which one chamber was empty. The position of the wounds showed that they had not fired upon each other. While the cause of their action was a total mystery to every one except Frau von Sigmundskron, the steps of it were singularly clear. It was evident that they had killed Clara deliberately and

had then killed themselves. Even the baroness was obliged to admit to herself that the mere fact of the exile returning suddenly was wholly inadequate to account for the three deaths.

She was a brave woman, and though she was profoundly horrified and grieved by what had happened she was conscious that she had not suffered any great personal loss. She had never known Rieseneck, she had never liked Clara, and her friendship for Greifenstein had not been great. Greif himself was safe, the only one of the family for whom she felt any affection, and in whom all her hopes for her daughter's happiness were centred. But for him, she would have refused the occasional hospitality of the castle as she had once refused the tardy assistance of its possessors. It is due to the memory of Greifenstein to repeat here that he never at any time realised the extremity of her need, and that it had been long before he had learned that she was really poor. But the Lady of Sigmundskron did not know this, and she

could not comprehend how completely her penury had been hidden from her relations by her own wonderful management and indomitable pride. At present, her thoughts were absorbed by the necessity of meeting Greif when he arrived, which must be within a few hours, and she sat calmly in her chair under the light of the candles that illuminated the chamber of death, trying vainly to frame some consoling speech which might break the violence of his sorrow. She knew how he had loved his father, and during his last visit she had noticed his increasing affection for his mother. She knew that he was aware of Rieseneck's existence, and she tortured her weary brain in the attempt to find some explanation that would not pain him needlessly, and which might nevertheless seem to account in some measure for the calamity that had overtaken him. But her trouble was thrown away, and many a cunning lawyer might have laboured in vain to frame out of the facts a consistent narrative. As the morning approached, the intensity of her thoughts was diminished

by her bodily fatigue, and she dreamed of other things, wondering somewhat vaguely whether it were right to marry her child to the son of the murderer and suicide whose dead body lay beside that of his victim under the yellow light of the tall candles, to the nephew of the traitor, whose tall figure was stretched upon a couch in the room beyond.

To most women the situation would have been infinitely more painful than it was to Therese von Sigmundskron. She was more like a sister of a religious order than a woman of the world. Years of ascetic practices, of constant self-sacrifice, of unswerving devotion had refined her nature from the fear of death, or the dread of its presence. We ask in vain why an existence of painful labour elevates some characters and debases others, inspires courage in some and in some destroys the power to face the inevitable. We search our experience and we know that the fact exists, we apply our intelligence to the study of it and we admit that the cause of the fact escapes us. The seeker after

explanations are bold with big words which tell us nothing, and call themselves physiological psychologists, or if that definition fails they say that they are psychological physiologists, and establish a difference in meaning between the one title and the other. But all the Greek words they can spell with Latin letters cannot show us what the human heart is, nor make us believe that it is seated in the right or in the left side of the brain, nor yet that it is established in the middle, in the island of Reil; any more than we admit that the human heart has anything to do with the little muscle-pump we carry in our breasts and which sometimes stops pumping just at the wrong moment for our convenience.

'Life is a continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations,' says the Apostle of the Misunderstanding. 'Adjustment' is good, for it means nothing. It would have shown better taste, however, to substitute for it a beautiful term of some sort, with a Greek root, a Latin suffix and an English termination, because in that

case a large majority of people would never have found out that the whole phrase was blatant nonsense. What are internal relations? Did the chief destroyer of common sense, the chief executioner of good English, mean, perhaps, the relations between that which is within and that which is without? He might have said so. It would not have meant much, but it would undoubtedly have meant something. And if life is this, then death must be the opposite, and death becomes 'a cessation of the adjustment of internal relations to external relations,' and if that is what it means we ought to say so when a man is dead, although nature continues to adjust the internal and the external relations afterwards in a way we do not care to see.

Fortunately for Frau von Sigmundskron, she had not read the works of the Apostle of the Misunderstanding, and was consequently able to bear her situation with some degree of equanimity. But it was a hard one for all that, and she could not help making some very ignorant but sincere

reflexions upon that state we call life, and upon that other state which is so near to it. What her thoughts would have been like had she known all that had happened, it is not easy to say. If she had known that she was entitled by the laws of her country to Greifenstein and to all that belonged to the name, as the only living and legitimate heir, she would certainly have looked at the future in another way. But she had no reason for thinking that all was not Greif's. So far as she knew, she was still the poor widowed gentlewoman she had been twelve hours earlier, struggling against poverty, starving herself for her daughter, looking to herself for courage and support, and to her child's wellbeing as the only source of her own happiness. The same in all respects save one, and that one change brought with it many bitter doubts. So long as Greifenstein and Clara had been alive, Hilda's marriage with Greif had seemed right in her eyes. She regretted Rieseneck's disgrace, as a family disaster, but her conscience was not so sensitive as to look at

it in the light of an obstacle to the union.

Now, however, there was that before her —there upon the bed of state in the glare of the lights—which changed everything very much. Between Greif and Hilda lay Greif's murdered mother, and Greif's father dead by his own hand. Therese von Sigmundskron was a Greifenstein at heart, and she would rather face misery and starvation than give her child to one whose name must for ever be branded with such a story. Very soon she felt that it would be impossible, and the prospect of so much suffering for Hilda appalled her. She thought of Greif, too, and she was profoundly grieved for him, for she had already looked upon him as her son. Of course, for the present, there could be no talking of the matter. If the poor fellow did not go mad with sorrow, he would nevertheless wish to put off his marriage for a year or more. She thought of Hilda's disappointment at the prospect of even retarding the happy day, she thought of the girl's despair

when she should know that the day could never come.

Then her resolution almost broke down, and she even argued with herself against it. Greif was innocent. It was no fault of his, he had no share in the fearful doings of last night, he was far away, thinking of Hilda, dreaming that he led her up the aisle of the church, counting the moments until he could come back to her. Why should he suffer the consequences of what others had done? Why should Hilda's young life be wrecked, condemned, perhaps, to perpetual poverty, ruined, most assuredly, by the overthrow of its only happiness? Could they not marry and live here, as Greif's father and mother had lived for years? Could they not be everything to each other, and nothing to the world?

Why had Greifenstein and Rieseneck killed Clara? The question cut short the good baroness's attempt to justify the marriage. It rose suddenly in her mind and covered every other thought with a veil. Since that day when poor Clara had

behaved so strangely on hearing of the amnesty, Frau von Sigmundskron had always believed that she knew more of Rieseneck than any one else supposed. Rieseneck had come, and he had not been in the house three hours when everything was over. What had happened? No one knew. Those who had known had acted out their own tragedy to the end and were gone with their secret. The authorities had already taken cognisance of their deaths and had drawn up their preliminary report. The three would be buried, perhaps side by side, in the vault of the Greifensteins, and no living person could ever know what had passed during their last moments. The most careful search had brought no trace of writing to the light excepting a letter addressed to an unknown person, evidently written before the catastrophe, which had been found, directed and stamped for the post, upon the library table. Everything in the house had been found in order, every object in its place. The servants had heard the two shots and had tried to enter the

room, but it had been locked within. A lad had climbed along the cornice until he could see through the window and had come back pale with terror. In the presence of the whole household the door had been forced, and all had seen together the hideous sight. That was all there was to be known.

As the castle clock struck one hour after another, the baroness felt that every minute was carrying the secret further beyond her reach, and yet, as the time passed, the effect of that secret's existence upon her own mind grew more and more clear to herself. She could never give Hilda to Greif. She could never suffer her child to mate with a man whose existence was overshadowed by such a history, innocent though he assuredly was himself.

And yet Greif was coming, and she had ridden all those weary miles through the freezing night in order to meet him at his own gate, in order to comfort him, to give him the help of her presence, the consolation of a friend in his utmost need. Would it

console him to know that he must lose the only surviving thing that was dear to him, the hope of Hilda? Her heart beat at the thought of the pain he would suffer, though it had been calm enough in the sight of the great horror.

But she could not yield the point. In spite of her gentle face she had all the unbending qualities of her masterful countrymen, as well as all the pride of the Greifensteins. She could not yield, let the resistance cost what it might.

The late winter's dawn stole through the crevices of the windows, which had been opened more than once during the night. The contrast of the still grey rays, seen through the flickering light of the candles that filled the place of death, was terribly unpleasant. The baroness rose and fastened the shutters carefully. As she turned back she shuddered for the first time since she had come. The slight exertion had stirred her tired blood and had made her momentarily nervous. The room looked very naturally. The huge carved bed of state

with its enormous canopy was where she had always seen it when she had visited the house. The massive furniture was arranged as usual, saving that there were high pedestals placed about the bed to support the heavy candlesticks. Nothing else was changed. But upon that bed lay two straight things, side by side, covered all over with fine linen. The great secret of death was there, and death had taken with him the key-word of a strange mystery.

## CHAPTER XIII

Rex sat in a careless attitude in a corner of Greif's small room, watching his friend as he arrayed himself in the official dress of a Korps student for the coming festivity. It was to be Greif's last appearance in public as a fellow. To-morrow there would be a meeting of the Korps and he would resign his functions, and some one else would be elected in his stead. Rex watched him curiously and hummed the first stanza of the 'Gaudeamus'—

> 'Give our hearts to gladness, then,
> While the young life flashes!
> When our joyous youth is gone,
> When old age's aches are done,
> Earth shall have our ashes!'

'I wish you would not sing that song!' exclaimed Greif, a little impatiently. 'There

will be time enough to exercise your voice upon it when we begin to throw away the torches.'

'It is the only song I ever heard that has any truth in it,' answered Rex.

'You ought to write one about the vortex, and call it the physicist's Lament,' laughed the other.

'The idea is not new. Scheffel made geological jokes in verse and sang them.'

'Go thou and do likewise! But do not make the idea of turning into a philistine more unpleasant than it naturally is.'

'We have all been through it,' said Rex, 'and most of us have survived the change. With insects, the caterpillar turns into the pretty moth. With Korps students, the butterfly becomes sooner or later a crawling, philistine grub. The moral superiority of the worm over the moth is manifest in his works. Have you read your speech over?'

'I know it by heart. Help me with the scarf, will you?'

'Vanity of vanities!' laughed Rex as he began to knot the coloured silk.

Greif's costume is worth a word of description. He wore a close-fitting yellow jacket, heavily trimmed with black, white and yellow frogs and crossed cords, in the hussar fashion, and finished at the neck in the military manner with a stiff high collar. His legs were encased in tight breeches of white leather, and long polished boots with riding flaps were drawn above the knee. The long straight rapier hung in its gleaming sheath by his side, the colours of the Korps being done in velvet upon the basket-hilt. Over his right shoulder he wore a heavy silk scarf of the three colours, which was tied in a big knot near the sword-hilt. Upon his bright hair a very small round cap, no bigger than a saucer, and richly embroidered with gold, was held in its place by mysterious means, involving the concealment of a piece of elastic beneath his short curls. Upon the table lay a pair of white leather gauntlets. The whole effect was theatrical, but in the surroundings for which the dress was intended, it could not fail to be both striking and harmonious. It dis-

played to the best advantage the young man's fine proportions and athletic figure, and where there were to be hundreds similarly arrayed, with only a difference of colour to distinguish their even ranks, the result could not differ greatly from a military parade. Indeed the costume is not more gaudy than many modern uniforms and is certainly as tasteful.

'I am sorry it is the last time,' said Greif sadly, as his friend finished the knot. Then he went to the window and looked once more at the dim outline of the cathedral spire and listened to the water rushing through its cold bed in the dusk far below. He knew that he should look out but a few times more. He did not know that this time was the last. Rex was looking for his overcoat, and as he moved about the room he sang softly another stanza of the old song—

'Short and sweet this life of ours,
Soon its cord must sever!
Death comes quick, nor brooks delay,
Ruthless, he tears us away,
No man spares he ever.'.

'For heaven's sake, do not sing that song any more!' cried Greif. 'I am sad enough, as it is, without your cat's music.'

Rex laughed oddly.

'I am as sad as you,' he said, a moment later, with an abrupt change of manner.

'You do not act as though you were,' observed Greif. 'What are you sad about?'

'World-sorrow.'

'Has the vortex fallen ill?' inquired Greif ironically.

'It is likely to, I fear. Come along! It is time to be off. You must not keep everybody waiting.'

Something in the tone of his voice struck Greif and affected him disagreeably. He held up the light to Rex's face, and saw that he was pale, and that his strange eyes looked weary and lifeless.

'What is the matter, Rex?' he asked earnestly. 'Are you in any trouble? Can I do anything for you?'

'Nothing, thank you,' answered the other quietly.

Greif set down the lamp upon the table

and seemed to hesitate a moment. Then he turned again and laid his hand upon his friend's arm.

'Rex, do you want money?' asked Greif. 'You know I have plenty.'

In the eyes of a Korps student the want of cash appears to be the only ill to which flesh is heir. Rex smiled rather sadly.

'No, I do not want money. I thank you, all the same.'

'What is it then? In love?'

'In love!' Rex laughed. 'I would tell you that soon enough,' he added carelessly. 'No—it is a more serious matter.'

'If I can be of no use to you——'

'Look here, Greif,' interrupted the other, 'we have grown to be good friends, you and I, during this term. You are going away, and I may never see you again. You may as well know why I fraternised with you so readily. I have had your friendship so far, and if I must lose it, I may as well lose it at once.'

Greif opened his bright eyes and stared at his friend in considerable astonishment.

He thought that he knew him well, and he could not imagine what was coming.

'I do not see what could happen to cause that,' he answered.

'Do you remember that evening when you first came to my rooms?'

'Of course.'

'Have I gained any advantage from our acquaintance, excepting your society and that of your Korps? Think well before you answer.'

'Certainly not,' replied Greif. 'I am quite sure that you have not. What a foolish question!'

'It seems so to you, no doubt. But it is far from foolish. You say that you remember that evening well. Then you recollect that I told you I knew nothing of you or your family. I made certain predictions. Well, I made them according to the figure, as you saw by the unexpected arrival of that telegram. But I lied to you about the rest. I knew perfectly well who you were, whence you came, and what your father's half-brother had done.'

Greif had drawn back a little during the first part of this declaration. At the statement that Rex had deceived him he started and drew himself up, his face showing plainly enough that his wrath was not far off.

'And may I ask your reasons for practising this deception upon me?' he inquired coldly.

'There is but one reason, and that is of a somewhat startling nature,' returned Rex, leaning back against the table and resting his two hands upon it. 'You allow that I have got no personal advantage out of your friendship. I desired none. I only wanted to know you.'

'Why?'

'Because I am your cousin. My name is Rieseneck. I am the only son of your father's half-brother.'

Greif's eyes flashed, and the hot blood mounted to his face. The information was surprising enough, and his hatred of his uncle was likely to produce trouble.

'How did you dare to impose upon me in such a way?' he cried angrily.

'No one ever speaks to me of daring,' answered Rex, who seemed quite unmoved. 'I dare do most things, because I have nothing to lose but a little money, my good name of Rex, and my life. As for my not calling myself Rieseneck, I have not imposed upon you any more than upon any one else, by doing so. My father calls himself Rex and I have never been known by any other appellation.'

'But you should have told me——'

'Doubtless, and so I have. It is true that I have chosen my own time, and that I have allowed myself the pleasure of knowing you before disclosing my identity. You would have refused to have anything to do with me had you known who I was. After all, you are the only relation I have in the world, and I have asked you for nothing, nor ever shall. I learned that you were a student here, and I came to Schwarzburg expressly to meet you. I noted your usual seat at the lecture where we met, and I put myself next to you with the intention of making your acquaintance. Now I have

told you everything. You are at liberty to know me or not, henceforth. You prefer not to know me. Is it so? Well, I have done you no injury. Good-bye. I wish you good luck.'

Thereupon Rex took up his hat and with a slight inclination of the head went towards the door. His stony eyes did not turn to Greif, who might have seen in them a strangely pained expression, which would have suprised him. Greif hesitated between his sincere friendship for Rex and his horror of any one so closely connected with Rieseneck. It was very hard to choose the right course with so little preparation, and he was thrown off his balance by the sudden disclosure. But his natural generosity, combined with an undefinable attraction he felt towards the man, overcame all other considerations.

'Rex!' he called out, as his friend was already passing through the doorway.

Rex stopped and stood still where he was, turning his head so that he could see Greif.

'Stay,' said Greif almost involuntarily. 'We cannot part company in this way.'

'If it must be at all, it were best that it were done quickly,' answered Rex, holding the handle of the door.

'It must not be done,' returned Greif in a decided tone. 'If I am attached to you, it is for what you are, not for what your father was, or is.'

'Think the matter over,' replied the other. 'I will wait, if you please. I deceived you once. It is fair that I should submit to your decision now.'

He closed the door and went to the window, where he stood still, looking out into the dusk, and turning his back upon Greif. The latter paused an instant, and then came forward and laid one hand upon his friend's shoulder. He acted still under the same impulse of generosity which had first prompted him to keep Rex back.

'Rex—it depends upon you. If you will, we shall be friends as ever.'

'I?' exclaimed Rex, turning suddenly.

'With all my heart. Is there anything I desire more?'

'Good—so be it, then!' answered Greif taking his hand boldly.

'So be it!' repeated Rex.

'And now,' said Greif, 'why did you choose this moment to tell me your secret?'

'Do you want to know? There is a reason for that, too, and not a pleasant one.'

'I can hear it.'

'To-night my father will sleep under your father's house. You will hear the news before morning. To-morrow I shall leave here to meet him in Switzerland—or not, as the case may be. He has been refused the benefit of the amnesty, but he will be allowed to leave the country quietly. I cannot leave him alone any longer.'

Greif turned a little pale at the intelligence.

'Then this is the danger you foretold,' he said.

'Yes.'

'What will happen at Greifenstein to-night?'

'How can I tell!' exclaimed Rex. 'There may be an angry meeting. There may be worse. Or your father's heart may be softened——'

'You do not know him. Then my uncle has written to you?'

'I received the letter to-day, before coming here. Do you see that it was better to have this explanation now, rather than to wait for to-morrow?'

'Yes—it was better. Let us go, for the time presses—truly I have no heart for this sport to-night. I wish I were at home.'

'Do not wish,' said Rex gravely. 'You could not help matters.'

Greif extinguished the light and the two men groped their way down the dusky staircase in silence, both feeling that an exceptionally difficult situation had been passed through with singular ease, both recognising that the explanation had been hurried over in a way hardly to be accounted for, except by the theory that neither wished to lose the other's friendship. And yet, both Greif and Rex knew that their decision had been

final. The one had nothing more to conceal. The other had nothing left to forgive. Rex, like Rieseneck himself, believed that his mother had died long ago. Greif, like all the rest, was ignorant of his own mother's identity. Sons of one mother they went out of the house side by side, not dreaming that they were anything more than cousins, whose fathers were half-brothers, little guessing that within a few short hours the father of each and the mother of both would be lying stiff and stark in the chambers of lofty Greifenstein.

They reached the great dark buildings of the University, and found themselves in a dense crowd of students of all colours, on the outskirts of a multitude of others who belonged to no associations. Here they parted, for Rex could not walk in the Swabian Korps and must go with the black hats.

'We shall meet in the hall,' said Greif hurriedly. 'Your place is at our table as usual.'

And so they parted. In a few moments,

Greif had found his companions by the tall standard whose colours caught a few struggling rays of light from the street-lamps. Every one was talking, smoking, stamping cold feet upon the stones in the effort to keep warm, cracking jokes, both good and bad, craning necks to see the position of the standards, making agreements for pairing at the 'Landesvater,' and generally complaining that the town clocks were all slow that night in Schwarzburg. Occasionally, a roar of laughter arose in the distance, where some unlucky burgher had found his way into a group of students and was being made the butt of a good-humoured jest. And beneath the high, laughing tones, the perpetual hum of a thousand talking voices neither rose nor fell, but droned unceasingly like the long pedal in a fugue, whose full deep note stands still amidst the strife of moving sounds, as the sun stood while the battle was fought out in Ajalon. The very life of the multitude seemed to produce a sound of its own, in the breathing of a thousand pairs of strong young lungs, in the beating of a thousand

young, untired hearts, in the pulsation of so much youth brought together to one place. A blind man might have thought himself in the presence of some one monstrous human giant, overflowing with enormous vitality, warming the whole night with his breath, stirring the whole air with each careless movement of his vast body. There is something mysterious in a crowd, most of all in a crowd at night. The throng has simultaneous perceptions and movements, a joint sense of power or of fear, a circulation of consciousness as complete as that which exists in the nerves of every individual. Thousands of men, of whom each alone would act differently from his fellows, are all irresistibly impelled to think the same thoughts, to feel the same emotions, to yield to the same influences, or to join in the same work of destruction. But no one of them all can tell why he so feels, thinks and acts; the mystery of the crowd is upon him, and sways him whither it will, powerless, half unconscious, and wholly irresponsible.

The deep cathedral bell tolled the hour of

seven. Before the strokes were all counted, the hum of the multitude had swelled to twice its former strength, and every one felt himself jostled a little by his neighbour. Then came the sharp, clear voices of those who directed the forming of the procession, the shuffling of many feet, and the muffled but irritated movements of those who had to make way. Then rose a sudden flare of light in a corner of the dark mass, followed quickly by another and another, till many hundreds of torches were aflame, sputtering, smoking and sending up tongues of flame into the black air. Again a word of command, and the even tramp of footsteps began to be heard, a mere patter as of big raindrops upon stones at first, but swelling gradually, and increasing, till the sound roused great echoes from the glowing buildings, while the blazing pitch flared up, brighter and brighter, into a broad sea of flame that flowed away in a narrow stream of fire as the great company filed out of the square into the street beyond. Then, as the place of meeting was emptied, a breeze of

cold air rushed into the vacant space; there was hurrying and scurrying of those who remained last, as they ran to take their places, and while a burst of march music was heard in the distance at the head of the column, the last stragglers fell into the file behind, the last torch disappeared into the narrow street, and the broad space that had been so full was left utterly deserted, illuminated only by a dozen dim gaslights in exchange for the lurid glow which a moment earlier had lit up every wall and house from corner stone to pointed gable.

In front of all, marched the Swabians, the high standard waving in front, the burly second of the Korps striding along upon its left with drawn rapier and clattering scabbard, while upon the right Greif walked, an erect and commanding figure, thrown into strong relief by the bright lights behind him. His face was pale, and his teeth were set, for as he led the head of the column he found time to reflect upon what had occurred during the last hour, and time to fear what was yet to happen. Willingly he would have left

the rank and hastened to his lodging in time to be ready for the night train. A few short hours would have brought him to his home to learn the truth, were it good or evil. But the thing was impossible. He was of all others that night the man most watched, most admired, most envied. It was his last torchlight procession, his last turn of presiding at the great festival that was at hand, the last draught of that brilliant student's life he loved was at his lips. He could never again do what he was doing to-night. To-morrow another would be chosen in his place, and to-morrow he was to join the dull ranks of the outer philistines. The thought brought suddenly a flash of wild recklessness into the gloomy atmosphere of his reflexions, and as he halted the column before the Rector's house and started the ringing cheer for the 'Magnificus,' his voice rang out with a metallic clearness that surprised himself.

'Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!' The vast chorus that followed his lead cheered his heart.

What could Rieseneck do at Greifenstein,

after all? There might be a disagreeable scene. Two of them, perhaps. That would be all, and Rieseneck would go away, never to return again. Rex and his predictions? Bah! The man believed in the power of the stars, and Greif, who trod so firmly at the head of a thousand torches, believed in youth, and would not forfeit his last draught of glorious youthfulness for any such nonsense.

On and on the procession marched, halting in the street where some favourite professor lived, in order to give him three thundering cheers, then tramping on to another and another, down the high street, round the cathedral, back at last to the square whence they had started.

Shoulder to shoulder the students ranged themselves against the walls of the houses in serried ranks, drawing back as much as possible, so as to leave a broad space in the middle. There was a pause, and a deep silence for several minutes. Then the trumpets and horns flared out the grand old hymn of student life, the 'Gaudeamus igitur, juvenes dum sumus,' and all those fresh

young voices took up the strain with that perfect unison which only Germans know how to give to an improvised chorus—

Gaudeamus igitur, juvenes dum sumus, post jucundam juventutem, post molestam senectutem, nos habebit humus, nos habebit humus.

Ubi sunt, qui ante nos in mundo fuere? Vadite ad superos, transite ad inferos, ubi jam fuere.

Vita nostra brevis est, brevi finietur, venit mors velociter, rapit nos atrociter, nemini parcetur.

Vivant omnes virgines faciles, formosae, vivant et mulieres, vivant et mulieres bonae, laboriosae.

Vivat academia, vivant professores, vivat membrum quodlibet, vivant membra quaelibet, semper sint in flore.

As the last stanza was sung, in slow and solemn measure, the students began to throw away their torches. First one alone shot out from the belt of fire that surrounded the square, meteorlike in a wide arch, and fell in the centre of the open space amidst a shower of sparks. A dozen followed almost immediately, then a hundred, and hundreds more, till all the thousand lay together, a burning heap, throwing up clouds of lurid smoke into the night, and illuminating the great buildings with a broad red glare.

Greif stood still a moment, watching the bonfire, and then sheathed his rapier and turned away. To him it was a sorrowful sight, this ending of his last torchlight procession. He remembered how, as a young novice, he had stood in the same place, his heart full of a strange enjoyment, and he wished that he could go back to those days and live his life again. During nearly three years since that time he had been a student; during more than one he had been a soldier, serving his time with the cuirassiers, and coming into the town as often as he could to spend an hour with his Korps. It was all over now, never to begin again. Only among those soldiers whom he had learned so easily to love, could he hope to find again something of that good fellowship he had enjoyed with the brethren of the Swabian Korps. Only in larger strife could he henceforth feel that glorious excitement of combat which had grown to be one of his nature's chief cravings. The Korps life had done its work in the direction of his character, developing his latent love of organisation and

law, accustoming him to look upon cold steel as the arbiter of right, and upon his country as the strongest among those that draw the sword.

'Earth shall have our ashes!' he exclaimed sorrowfully as he turned away, quoting the last words of the song.

'Undoubtedly,' answered a familiar voice beside him. 'Undoubtedly—wherefore the best thing we can do is to make the earth ours without delay.'

Greif laughed, as he recognised Rex. The latter had made his way round, during the throwing of the torches, in order to accompany his friend to the drinking-hall. They moved away together in the great crowd. One ceremony was ended, the next would begin in little more than half an hour, as soon as all the Korps were collected in the hall. This time, however, the company would include the Korps only, with their friends, and such members of other Universities as had come over to Schwarzburg to join in the festivity.

'And now for my last speech,' observed

Greif, as they walked. 'I wonder what is happening at home.'

Rex did not make any answer, but Greif saw that he bent his head, and seemed to start nervously. The reply came long afterwards, as they were ascending the steps of the drinking-hall.

'I would rather not know what is happening,' said Rex. 'But I would like to know where you and I shall be, to-morrow at this hour.

'Probably together, with all good Swabians, at my farewell feast.'

Rex shook his head. There was not time for more, as they were already within the building and Greif was obliged to attend to other matters.

The hall was splendidly decorated. Each of the Korps had a portion of the walls allotted to it, before which its tables were arranged in order. From the rafters to the floor vast draperies of coloured stuffs were hung and festooned so as to show off the insignia of each association to the best advantage, panoplies of swords and helmets,

escutcheons with broad bands of gold, silver and black, scores of richly mounted drinking-horns, taken from every kind of beast, from the Italian ox, from the Indian buffalo, from the almost extinct ibex, and from the American mountain sheep—gifts from old members of the Korps who had wandered over the world, but had not forgotten their old companions — silver tankards upon brackets, old standards of softened hue projecting out above, or crossed above coats-of-arms, in short, every object of beauty and value which had become the property of the Swabians during the last fifty years. Every other Korps had done the same, till not a foot of the walls was left bare. High above, in a gallery, sat the musicians, who were to accompany the songs with their instruments, during the night.

The students assembled quickly and took their seats. As the clock struck nine, Greif, as president of the presiding Korps, called for silence, and ordered the opening 'Salamander.' Hundreds of glasses rattled upon the oak boards in strict time,

and the official Kneipe was declared opened. The music burst out gloriously, echoing among the great wooden beams of the high roof, and song upon song rose full and melodious from below. At last Greif rose again to his feet, and all eyes were turned upon him in the dead silence which succeeded the joyous strains. He was very pale, but it was easy to see that his pallor was caused by the emotion of thus taking leave of his old comrades, rather than by any nervousness about his speech.

He spoke long and well, interrupted occasionally by a short loud burst of applause. It was his especial good fortune to address the assembled Korps for the second time since his name had been inscribed upon the rolls of their beloved Alma Mater; his greatest sorrow was caused by the thought that he had thrown his last torch, and must soon drain his last toast as one of their number. Life was divided by a sharp line into two portions, of which the sadder began when rapier and colours were hung up at home to accumulate the dust

that falls from philistinism. Then the head must weary itself with staid matters, and the hand must loosen its hold upon the *schläger* and forget its cunning fence. Happy were those who merely exchanged the whistling blade of the student for the heavy sabre of the soldier, the green forest glade of the *mensur* for larger battlefields and the hope of brighter fame, who, having shed an ounce of blood in defence of their student colours, could look forward to shedding all, to the last drop, for king and country. Happy were those few to whom the Korps was the beginning of an active life, and not the mere breathing space of liberty and good fellowship between the school bench and the desk. But whatever was to follow, whatever had gone before, none knew so well as they themselves, how sweet was the first taste of freedom, and how swiftly the bright time glided away amidst the music of the rapiers, the clash of beakers, and the song of free German voices.

Greif dwelt upon the importance of the

Korps in the life of the University, upon the part played by the University in the life of the whole land, and did not scruple to trace Germany's victories directly to their origin in the daily life of German students, so different from that in other countries. Moreover, in his own opinion, and in that of most of his hearers, Schwarzburg had no rival — certainly none, he added, in the eyes of those who belonged to it. Where, in all Germany, were there such professors, such monuments of learning? What schools had given more famous names to the land, or even so many? As the good mother at home was to each student in that assembly, so was their dear Alma Mater to them all. He drank his beaker to all good Korps students, to all the brave colours there assembled, to all the professors, to the University itself.

'Hoch, Schwarzburg! Hoch!' he cried in ringing tones as he raised his glass high in air.

'Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!' shouted hundreds of voices.

'Ad exercitium Salamandri! Eins! Zwei! Drei!'

Greif brought his glass down upon the table as he spoke the last words, and the long roll began, like rattling musketry, again and again, to the due number of times.

Greif sat down amidst thunders of applause. As a matter of fact, he had made a speech rather better than the average of such performances, but a cool observer, or one accustomed to such scenes would have known that he could not fail to be loudly applauded. He was the favourite hero of them all. Young, handsome, brave, popular, not lacking the assurance that leads a crowd, it might have been foreseen that his last feast would crown his University triumphs, with a success passing even his own not very modest expectations.

## CHAPTER XIV

The music rose and swelled and died away. Beneath the brilliant light there was clashing of beakers and joyous drinking of deep toasts in the intervals between the songs. At regular intervals Greif demanded silence and proposed the health of each of the other Korps, one by one, in the order of their precedence for the year. A couple of hours passed in this way, and then the signal was given for the singing of the 'Landesvater,' and the instruments struck up the stirring strain. Then at the head of each table rose the two eldest fellows, each with a pointed sword in his hand. In time with the music, they stood and struck their rapiers one against the other, exchanging caps at the last bars, and run-

ning the sharp blade through the embroidered velvet, so that the small head covering ran down upon the hilt. Next, while the others stood upon the floor, the two leaders mounted upon the bench behind each row, on opposite sides of the table, clashing their swords in time, high above the heads of the carousers; and as the verse ended, each snatched the cap from the crown of the man who sat below him and ran it down his blade as he had previously done with his partner's. Reaching in due time the end of the board, the two stood crossing and recrossing their weapons, until all the others in the great hall had done the same and not one head remained covered. With this the first half of the 'Landesvater' was ended, and a solemn toast was drunk to the health of the sovereign. The second part was gone through in a similar manner, the leaders returning along the rows with the same ceremony and restoring to each man his own head covering at the conclusion of each verse. It is a strange old custom of which it is not easy

to discover the origin, though the meaning is clear enough. Every man of the assembly pledges his head to live and die for his sovereign prince or king, and in a country where loyalty is a fact, and patriotism a passion, the expression of both by an ancient ceremony is solemnly imposing. So great is the respect felt for the 'Landesvater' and the sincerity of those who take part in it, that even in such a multitude of recklessly gay youths, the strictest sobriety is required of all until it is over, and is exacted under penalties of considerable severity. Once over, the mirth and enjoyment proceed in an increasing ratio, though it is to the credit of the German student that his gaiety on these public occasions never degenerates into unbridled licence, and that while he sings, laughs and jests over his fiftieth glass, he maintains the outward forms of habitual courtesy towards his fellows, together with a sort of manly dignity not unworthy of his stern Gothic forefathers. The liquor is bland and almost harmless, and the heads are

strong, and backed by iron constitutions. The object is not intoxication but jollity, and there is a deliberation in the manner of attaining the end by spending eight or nine hours over it, which effectually prevents such scenes as occur at festive meetings where the time is limited and men make themselves beastly drunk in the attempt to be merry before midnight. There is no closing hour for the German students' carousals. The official part of the affair is declared to be at an end at twelve or one o'clock, but all may stay as long as they please, and many are still in their places when the day dawns.

Greif and Rex sat side by side at the head of the long table. It was long past midnight, but neither felt the need of sleep. Greif dreaded to go home, for he felt that he was taking his last leave of a life he loved. Rex, who was unnaturally calm, even for a man of his solid nerve, sat motionless beside his friend, emptying his huge beaker twice in every hour with unfailing regularity. He talked quietly but

constantly, interspersing queer bits of cynicism and odds and ends of uncommon wisdom in his placid conversation. Greif knew by his manner that he was in reality sad and preoccupied, but was grateful for his pleasant talk, which blunted the keen edge of this rupture with first youth's associations. From time to time Greif wondered rather vaguely whether his relations with Rex would continue in after life, and, if so, whether they would not be affected for the worse by the revelation of Rex's identity. The excitement of the evening had perhaps momentarily expanded his natural generosity too far, and while he was quite aware that he could not now draw back from the friendship with honour, he was by no means sure that he might not afterwards regret his readiness to receive so kindly, as a cousin, him whom he had so much liked before he had been aware of the relationship. As he sat there, conversing with Rex, he attached an amount of importance to the situation which would have amazed him, had he known that of which both were

ignorant, namely, that Rex was his half-brother as certainly as Rieseneck was half-brother to old Greifenstein.

The hours wore on till scarcely fifty students remained in the hall, and they of the sturdy kind who make very little noise over their amusements.

'Shall we go home, or stay till morning?' asked Greif at last, hesitating whether to light a fresh cigar or not.

'We might adjourn to your room,' suggested Rex. 'We can finish the night there.'

There was a stir near the door, and Greif looked round, idly at first, to see what was the matter, then with an expression of dismay. A man had entered the hall, a man with a ghastly face, who seemed to be making inquiries of the knot of Korps servants who waited for their tardy masters. Greif's eyes fixed themselves in the anticipation of evil, when he saw that the fellow wore the Greifenstein livery and was one of his father's grooms. What was most strange was that he wore boots and spurs,

as if he had ridden hard, though he could only have reached Schwarzburg by the railway.

'Karl!' cried Greif in a tone that made the man start. 'What are you doing here?'

Karl crossed the hall, his face growing paler than ever, and his teeth chattering. He had not had time to recover from the thought of what he had left behind him. His hands trembled violently as they grasped the military cap he held.

'Herr Baron——' he stammered, staring at Greif with wide and frightened eyes. 'Herr Baron——' he began again, trying to frame the words.

'Speak, Karl!' exclaimed Greif making a desperate effort to seem calm, though he instinctively dreaded the words which must fall from the man's lips.

The groom turned appealingly to Rex, who sat motionless in his place, scrutinising the messenger with his stony glance.

'My God!' cried he. 'I cannot tell him! Sir, are you a friend of the Herr Baron?'

Rex nodded, and laying one hand upon Greif's shoulder as though to make him keep his seat, rose and made a sign to the groom to follow him. But Greif would not submit to be treated like a child, and sprang up, seizing the man's arm and drawing him nearer.

'I will hear it myself,' he said firmly. 'Is it my father?' he asked in uncertain tones.

Karl nodded gravely.

'I caught the train as I jumped from the saddle,' he answered.

'My mother sent you?' asked Greif anxiously.

The groom shook his head, and his tremor increased, while he stared wildly about as though in search of some escape from his awful mission.

'Speak, man!' cried Greif, mad with anxiety. 'My father is ill—and you are here though my mother did not send you—speak, I say.'

'They are dead,' answered Karl in a low voice.

Greif sank into his seat and covered his face. Suddenly Rex's impenetrable eyes flashed, and he, last of the three, turned white to the lips.

'Is there another gentleman at Greifenstein?' he asked quickly.

'He is also with them, sir.'

'Dead?'

'He shot himself.'

Rex closed his eyes and held the table with his two hands, for he knew who the stranger had been. Seeing that Greif did not move, and supposing that Rex was a mere acquaintance, the man took courage to tell the story, speaking in a low voice to Rex.

'The gentleman arrived before dinner,' he said. 'Their merciful lordships dined together, but the butler said they left the table before it was time. Then they heard firing in the house. We broke the doors and found the Lady Baroness dead, in the room beyond the Herr Baron's study, and in the study the Herr Baron dead with a pistol in his hand, and the other gentleman dead with another pistol in his

hand. I saw them. They had shot themselves as they sat in their chairs before the fire, but the fire was nearly gone out, though the lamp was burning. And then we saddled and rode, we four, one for the police, one for the doctor, one for Sigmundskron, and I for the railway, and here I am. You are a good friend of the young Herr, sir?'

'Yes, that I am,' answered Rex, starting as though from sleep.

'Then it would be best, sir, that you should tell me whither I should go, for the young Herr will be worse if he sees me.'

'Ask your way to the Red Eagle Inn,' said Rex, 'and stay there till we send for you.'

He gave the man a handful of loose coin, thoughtful of all contingencies, as he ever was.

'You need not talk about this horrible catastrophe,' he said, as he dismissed the frightened groom.

The latter disappeared as fast as he could, glad to get away from the sight of Greif's misery, and glad to have found some

one to help him in telling his fearful tale. When he was gone Rex laid his hand upon Greif's shoulder, and spoke in a tone of quiet authority.

'Come with me,' he said. Greif rose to his feet like a man in a dream, and allowed Rex to put on his topcoat for him, and to lead him out of the almost deserted hall, through the group of servants who loitered at the door and made way respectfully for the pair to pass.

'Whither?' asked Greif as they stood in the cold street.

'To your room,' answered Rex, quietly passing his arm through his friend's and gently urging him to move forward.

Greif did not remember afterwards how he had found his way from the hall to his lodging. Neither he nor Rex spoke during the quarter of an hour they employed in reaching the street-door, but Rex's arm was aching with the effort of sustaining and directing his companion. He lit a taper and prepared to help him up the stairs. But the sight of the familiar entrance re-

called Greif to himself and dissipated the first stupor of his grief. He ascended the steps firmly, though he went like a man overcome with fatigue, to whom every movement is difficult. Still silent, Rex lit the lamp in the small room, and began to help Greif to take off his mantle. But Greif pushed him aside gently and sat down as he was upon the well-worn chair. Rex went and sat himself down in a corner at some distance and waited. His instinct told him that his friend must have time to recover from the first shock before anything could be done. He shaded his eyes from the light with one hand, and thought of his own sorrow.

The silence was intense. It was as though the spirits of the dead, of the mother of both and of the father of each, were present in the commonplace chamber where sat their two sons, not knowing each other for brothers, though overwhelmed by the same calamity. It seemed as if the murdered woman and her dead murderers were standing silently in the midst of the

small room, watching to see what should happen to those they had left behind.

At last Greif raised his white face and looked towards Rex.

'I must go,' he said simply.

'Yes,' answered Rex. 'We must bury our dead.'

Greif looked at him as though asking for an explanation of the words. He had not heard all the groom's story.

'My father is also with them,' said Rex, answering the unspoken question.

Greif grasped the table and stared at his companion stupidly for a moment. Then all at once his pale face grew luminous and his eyes glittered.

'Rieseneck?' he cried, in a suffocated tone. 'Your father has slain mine and yet you are here——' He rose from his seat, half mad with horror, as though he would spring upon his friend. But the latter interrupted him, in a tone which enforced attention.

'Your mother is dead—God knows how. Your father and my father shot themselves, sitting in their chairs.'

Again Greif's head sank upon his clasped hands, and again the deadly silence descended upon the chamber.

The long December night was over and it was broad dawn when the two men got out of the express train at the station nearest to Greifenstein. Without a word they entered the carriage that had been waiting for them, and the sturdy horses plunged into the forest, breasting the ascent as only strong animals can on a cold winter's morning. The early light made the great trees look unspeakably gloomy and mournful. There was not a tinge of colour to relieve the dead black shadows, or the icy grey of the driven snow. The tall firs stood solemn and motionless like overgrown cypresses, planted in an endless graveyard, filled with myriads of snow-covered graves, and in the midst Greif and Rex were whirled along over the winding road, pale as dead men themselves as they sat side by side in their dark garments, with set lips and eyes half closed against the freezing wind.

But when the towering wall of Greifen-

stein came into sight far off above the black tree-tops, Greif started and leaned forward, fixing his eyes upon his home; nor did he change his attitude until the carriage drew up before the deep gateway, and he was aware of a crowd of men and women who stood there awaiting his arrival. Before all the rest, he saw the tall thin figure of Frau von Sigmundskron. Her white hands were clasped together and she was bareheaded. Standing out before the others, in her gown of sober grey, she looked like a mediæval saint suddenly come down to earth in modern times. As Greif descended she held out her arms to greet him. He realised that she must have journeyed from Sigmundskron in the night in order to be before him.

'I thank you,' he said, kissing her hands.

With an effort of will that would have done credit to his dead father, he entered the castle, bending his head gravely in acknowledgment of the servants' tearful salutations. Though most of them were the merest hirelings in the house, who had lately

succeeded others like themselves, yet almost all were in tears.

Frau von Sigmundskron looked at Rex in some surprise.

'A friend?' she asked with some hesitation.

'More,' answered Greif. 'Let us go to some place where we can be alone.'

He shivered as he felt that he was under the very roof where those he loved best were lying cold and stark in death, but he set his lips and clenched his fingers, determined to bear all that was in store for him. Frau von Sigmundskron hesitated as they approached the door of the drawing-room, and she looked sideways at Greif.

'Better to my rooms,' he said. And so the three went on through corridors and staircases till they reached the young man's apartments. He closed the door, and glanced at Rex.

'Madam,' said the latter at once, 'I am called Rex, but that is not my name. I am the son of Kuno von Rieseneck. I have

Herr von Greifenstein's permission to pay my last duty to my dead father.'

Frau von Sigmundskron raised her gentle eyes in astonishment and looked from one to the other of the two men.

'Rex is my best friend,' said Greif. 'He needed no permission of mine to come here. I will explain all at another time. And now——' his voice broke, and he turned away, but recovered himself almost immediately. 'And now, I beg that you will tell us what you know.'

The good baroness detested weakness in herself and could not bear to see it in others, so that she told her story clearly and concisely, though with much caution and thoughtful tact. While she spoke she watched the two friends, who sat motionless beside her, their hands clasped upon their knees, their heads bent down, their faces white with emotion. The sun was already above the hills, and while she spoke the first rays fell through the ancient casement upon the carpet of the room, casting soft reflexions upon the pallid features of the three persons.

'I will go to them,' said Greif when she had finished, and he rose to his feet. The baroness prepared to show him the way, and Rex would have followed, but she stopped him by a gesture.

'I will come back for you,' she said. 'They are not together.'

She let Greif enter the chamber alone and softly closed the door after him. Then she returned to Rex. He was standing where she had left him.

'I have something to say,' she began, 'and something to give you. This letter is yours. It was found in the room, sealed, directed and stamped, as though it were to be posted, as it would have been had you not come. Nothing has been discovered for Greif, and this must have been written by Herr von Rieseneck. You are older than Greif, though he is brave enough, poor fellow. Here it is. Will you be alone to read it? I will go into the next room until you call me.'

'Madam,' answered Rex, taking the letter, 'I will not trouble you by any

exhibition of my feelings, if you will stay here.'

He looked at the superscription, and cut the envelope open neatly with his pocket-knife so as not to break the seal. Frau von Sigmundskron was too well-bred to watch his face while he read the contents. Had she looked, she would have been terrified.

The note was very short, but it contained enough to shake even Rex's calm nature.

'My son, when you receive this, I shall be dead. I arrived here this evening and I have discovered that Frau von Greifenstein is your mother, my wife. She made me believe that she was dead and married my brother under a false name. She has atoned for her crimes to her two husbands, who have done justice upon her, and now we also are about to pay the penalty of having executed that justice which is above all laws. At the point of death, I give this secret into your keeping. Your brother is a nameless bastard. Do not ruin him by betraying the shame of your father and of

his. You are rich, but were you poor you would have no title to my brother's inheritance. Do not come to this place. They will bury me as decently as I deserve. Farewell. God keep you, and make you happier than I have been.—Your father,

'VON RIESENECK.

'SCHLOSS GREIFENSTEIN, *December* 20.'

As Rex read the words he instinctively turned away. His face was hideously distorted and his stony eyes seemed changed into coals of fire. Every fibre of his strong nature was strained and tortured by the iron grip of his suffering. Every pulse of his body beat with a frantic rage for which no outlet was possible. His eyeballs burned with excruciating pain as he attempted to read again the letter he still held in his hands. He was one of those habitually calm men who become almost insane when they are angry, and in whose placid strength passion of any sort, when roused, finds its most dangerous material. For a full minute he stood speechless, feeling as though his

emotion must find some physical expression, lest it should kill him there and then.

He heard a footstep, and then the door opened and closed softly. Looking round, he saw that he was alone; Frau von Sigmundskron had understood from what she could see of his attitude that the letter had brought him news even worse than that of his father's death, and she had felt that to stay any longer would have been to intrude upon a sorrow in which she could have no share. Seeing that she was gone, Rex abandoned all restraint over himself, and submitted for a time to the overwhelming influences that surrounded him on all sides. His face became livid as he threw himself upon the couch, and his fingers were twisted unnaturally, as though their nerves were irritated by a strong electric current. Lying on his back, he rolled his head from side to side, like a man tortured on the rack, while his reddening eyes kept their sight fixed upon a blank point of the ceiling. The pain in his temples was as that of a red-hot screw boring its way through his brain, and while

his white teeth ground audibly upon each other his quick-coming breath blew a scarcely perceptible foam from his strained and parted lips.

Father, mother, honour, were gone at one blow. Not the mother he had learned to dream of as a boy, when some faint memory of her fair face was still with him; not the tender and gentle mother who, if she had lived, would have been dearest on earth to him, and whose untimely death had lent her something heavenly and brightly mysterious; not the mother of whom his father had often told him, who from her place of peace looked down, perhaps, and smiled when he did well, or was pained when he did wrong; not the mother who, in his sleep, seemed to walk beside him when he was a child, robed in white, holding him by the hand and pointing heavenwards, like the picture of the Guardian Angel so common in his native country; not that mother who was to him the embodiment of all that was pure and lovely, and saintly and kind; not that sweet mother who for

nearly forty years had held her secret place in the strange labyrinths of the lonely student's heart, to whose angelic figure he had often turned for consolation when weary with the aimlessness of deep study that led to nothing, or when satiated with all the useless, pleasureless pleasure which money could give and which there was no one to forbid. That dear image was gone, but she was not the mother he had lost. She who had borne him was lying near him now, under that very roof. She had cast him off, him and his father, to spend all those years when he had thought her dead, with another man, worst shame of all, with the brother of her husband. And she had borne another son, she had given a brother to her first-born, whom the world called noble and rich, who in truth was penniless and nameless as any beggar in the street. She had heaped dishonour upon father and son, and she had born in dishonour a second son and shamed the spotless life of a second father. And this woman, this wretch, this creature for whom no speakable name could be found,

was his own mother, and was henceforth to stand in the place of her whose mere memory had been half divine. Her vile life, forfeited for her crimes as shamefully as though she had died by the defaming hands of the common hangman, her hideous existence was thrust before him in all its abomination, as the source of his own, in the stead of all that had seemed most holy and chaste and worthy of his reverence. Was not her blood in his veins? Must not her evil nature of necessity show itself sooner or later in his own? Better the ounce weight of a finger upon that little bar of steel, to press which was to go beyond the risk of human infamy, beyond the possibility of reproducing in his own life the merest shadow of the sins that had darkened hers to the end. Better to cross at once that bridge whose passage is never choked because all who go over move ever in the same way, and none pause whose path has led them to its hither side. Better to leap at once and take his secret out of human keeping.

He would not have believed the horror if he had learned it from living man. But the message came from those who had sealed its truth with the dark red seal; it came from two men who had not been mistaken, of whom either, suspecting a mistake, would have slain the other for the mere accusation; old men not carried away by a fleeting resemblance, by the breath of a word half understood, by suspicion of a glance only half seen; stern, bold men—too stern to relent, but far too brave to be moved suddenly to senseless wrath against an innocent woman; proud men, both, who would have denied to each other the possibility of their common shame, so long as denial was humanly possible.

There could be no doubt, no shadow of a hope. Greif von Greifenstein was brother to Rex, and both were fatherless and motherless on the same day. Why live on, beneath the weight of memories which no time could efface and no future happiness soften? Had he any obligations to mankind, had he any pride of half-fulfilled hopes, of half-satisfied

ambition? What had his life been? A nameless one, though of the two he alone could claim a name, if all were known. What had he done with it? He had attempted to explore the sources of life and the first origin of all those strange states which life brings with it. He had spent years in patient study, and again for months he had experimented upon his own incomprehensible sensations, by alternately procuring himself every pleasure and amusement which money could command, and then seeking the contrast of solitary asceticism. His iron constitution of body had survived all, but his bright intelligence had wearied of the struggle, bruising its keen edge against the rocky barriers of the eternal and the unknown. Wiser than his fellows, he knew that he was no wiser than before; stronger than they, he knew the weakness of all strength; brave as the bravest, bravery seemed to him but a clumsy exhibition of vanity at best, and altogether contemptible from the moment it began to seek occasions for showing itself. He could have under-

stood playing the coward for the sake of examining the sensation, and would have laughed at his own vanity, when it led him to redeem his character the next moment by some act of reckless daring. What was it all, but an amazing show of puppets, an astounding dance of lay-figures, animated by strings of which the ends opposite from men were lost in infinite distance? To dance, or not to dance, was all the choice men had, and rather than play a part in such a show as fell to his lot, it seemed better to break the strings and let the miserable marionette fall into the black hole behind the stage.

The possibility of adding a fourth link to the chain of death arrested Rex's frenzy. Since it was so easy to die, the escape from an earthly hell was always at hand. If, then, he lived, it must be of his own free will, and it did not beseem a man to do with such an ill grace what he did from his choice. Either he must end the matter decently and quietly at once, or, choosing not to end it, he must gather his strength

and resume the direction of his existence. No other conclusion was possible. His secret was his own, and none need know it. All was over, and the disclosure of the truth could not help justice, any more than its concealment could injure any one. On the contrary, to tell what he knew would be to ruin Greif.

At the thought of Greif, Rex grew calm, and sat upright on the couch, supporting himself with his hands and gazing absently at the opposite wall. He had something left to live for, since Greif was his brother —Greif, who was at this very moment weeping over the body of her who was mother to both, looking for the last time upon that face which doubtless recalled to him the same tender memories Rex himself had cherished so long and so faithfully. A strong desire to see her took hold of him. The mistaken veneration of a lifetime was gone in a moment and Rex experienced the necessity of putting in its place the truth, however horrible it might be. But, unknown to him, a touch of tenderness

remained in the bottom of his heart. Sinful, ruined, dead by the hands of the men she had foully wronged, she had nevertheless been his mother. He said to himself that he would see her, in order that the last impression might finally wipe out all those that had been sweet before it; but in spite of every circumstance of shame that had attended her death, and in spite of his own reasoning, what drew him to her was in reality the strength of what he believed to be wholly eradicated and torn from him, the unconscious longing to see once more the face of her who had borne him, and whose image had been with him since he was a little child.

To see her, and then—what then? The future was a blank, of which the monotony was broken only by the figure of Greif. The idea of devoting himself to his brother, and of expending all his strength and intelligence in the attempt to make him outlive the dreadful memory of this day, presented itself to Rex's mind. He smiled faintly, for the thought was unlike most of

his thoughts. He did not remember to have ever before entertained a similar project. He had sacrificed his inclinations many times in the pursuit of knowledge, and even occasionally out of good nature, but he had never set himself the task of systematically benefiting another man. And yet, he knew well enough that Greif would need support and help and comfort, and that there would be none at hand to offer all these, save Rex himself.

He rose from his seat and paced the room, his hands behind him, his eyes bent down. His face still bore the marks of his sudden and terrible suffering, but the perfectly balanced powers of his mind were already beginning to assert themselves. The habit of scepticism, that is, of systematic inquiry into all that befell him, was too strong to remain long in abeyance, and the equilibrium of the mental forces, cultivated to excess by his method of study, was too stable in nature to be long disturbed, even by the greatest calamity. To-day he saw the necessity of applying his intelligence

to the alleviation of Greif's sorrow and to the preservation of Greif's existence, endangered by such a blow. In a few weeks at the latest, his own sufferings would acquire an objective interest, and would become so many data for study in the great case of all humanity. Rex could never have been a hero. He could never have detached his own individuality from its place in his map of mankind, so as to believe himself different from all other men, as heroes must believe themselves. He felt that the balance lay between his own life and death, and that he could turn the scale at his own choice; he could never have made himself forget life in the hope of victory, nor death in the fear of failure. Incapable of any transcendental belief whatsoever, his intelligence had deified free-agency, while his unacknowledged suspicion of a directing power asserted itself in his theories concerning nature's fatalism. He supposed that the machinery of the universe produced inevitable phases in the lives of individuals and of nations; he knew that in

all that had happened to him he had been free to exercise his choice between two alternatives. Such a choice was now before him, and for the first time in his life he determined to devote himself to the welfare of another.

## CHAPTER XV

An hour later Rex was supporting Greif as he returned from the state bedchamber to his own room. Strong and determined to be calm as the young man was, the sight had been too much for him, and it was clear that unless he could obtain sleep his nerves must break down under the strain they suffered. He reeled in his walk like a man half asleep, his bright eyes were glassy and fixed, his relaxed fingers were incapable of grasping Rex's arm, and the latter held him upright upon his feet and almost carried him along the dim corridors.

Rex also had seen, but when he had once been face to face with that which had irresistibly drawn him to the room, he had felt no desire to look again. The drawn, white

features of the dead lady recalled nothing to his mind out of the sweetness of the past, while their fixed expression of pain intensified the horror of the present until it grew unbearable. He had stayed long in the other chamber, where his father lay, and as he gazed upon the stern dark face his wrath rose, swelling tumultuously in his breast, as the tide of the sea, ebbing away as he thought of what was beyond and as he realised that all vengeance had been accomplished, and all justice done, so that no one remained alive against whom he could feel anger, no one upon whom his hand could fall. They had taken the law into their own hands and had executed its extreme sentence upon her who had wronged them, and they had expiated their deed in their own bodies. Never was tragedy so swift, so desperate and so complete.

And now the morning sun was high in the heavens, mocking the solemn darkness of men's hearts with his fierce brightness, shining upon the ancient walls of Greifenstein as coldly and clearly through the keen

winter air as he had shone yesterday and as he would shine to-morrow. From eave and stringcourse and dripstone of the old castle the melting patches of dazzling snow sent down mimic showers of diamond drops, and the moisture thawed from them made dark stains upon the grey masonry. A redbreast skipped about the furrows made in the white carpet by the carriage wheels, paused, turned his tiny impertinent head, and glanced up at the ramparts with a squint, as though to tell the time of day by the sun and the shadows of the projecting eaves. From the paved court of the stables, where all had been hurry and confusion on the previous night, came the occasional noise of an impatient hoof stamping upon the stones, the even sound of brushes on smooth coats as the men leisurely groomed the horses, the tinkling of curb-chains polished and rubbed together by idle lads who were in no hurry, and occasionally the echo of a voice, instantly subdued to an undertone as the speaker remembered that this day was not to be like other days. At the door of

the servants' hall the two comfortable policemen in their dark uniforms and shining buttons sunned their fair beards as they smoked their morning pipes, exchanging a remark in a low voice about once in five minutes, and never without previously looking round to see whether any one was listening to them, but chiefly occupied in watching an underkeeper who was feeding the big hounds in a sunny corner of the inner court.

Nature, in her pitiless irony, seemed more than usually mirthful on that clear morning. It was such a day as old Greifenstein who lay upstairs, dead beside his dead wife, would have chosen to tramp far into the forest, with his gun on his shoulder and his dogs at his heels. It was such a day as would have made poor Clara's lot seem easier, softening her tortured conscience in a thaw of passing satisfaction, pleasant while it lasted, transitory as the gleam of light and warmth in the dismal winter of the Black Forest. The forest itself alone was unchanged. The trees looked blacker than ever against the

blue sky and under the violent light. Around the vast amphitheatre of the hills they stood motionless in their even rows, like a great assembly of dark-robed judges, judging the dead who lay in their midst, inquisitors whom no brightness could brighten, and in whose sombre countenances no smile was reflected from the glorious sky and dazzling light. Silent, grand, funereal, they stood in their places as they had stood a hundred years ago, before those lives began which had now suddenly gone out, as they would stand when those other lives were extinguished which now were young.

Neither Greif nor Rex was seen again that day. In the course of time, the representatives of the law arrived, did their office, and were regaled with a collation by the butler, during which they sat upon the chairs which last night had been occupied by those whose end they had come to ascertain. The case was very plain and their duties were simple. They went away and took the two policemen with them. Frau von Sigmundskron moved noiselessly about

the house, giving the necessary directions when there were any to be given, occasionally sitting down in a quiet corner to read a few pages of a devotional book she had found. More than once she went to the different rooms where Greif and Rex had withdrawn, to see whether she could be of any use. Greif was always in the same place, leaning back in a great easy-chair, pale and exhausted with grief, but evidently master of himself. At last she found him asleep, and she drew a long breath of relief, for she knew that the chief danger was past. When she went to Rex she found him reading, and he did not relinquish his occupation during the whole day, so far as she could ascertain. Whether he understood what he read, or not, was more than she could determine. The volume contained a part of Goethe's works, and when she glanced at the page she saw that the student had selected the second part of Wilhelm Meister for his reading. He always looked up quietly when she entered, thanked her, and said that he needed nothing.

Frau von Sigmundskron could not rest. The sense of responsibility which she felt might alone have sufficed to sustain her energy, but her mind was disturbed by a matter even weightier in her eyes. The tremendous difficulties of the future presented themselves very clearly to her mental view, and she knew that before long they would not be mere shadows of things to come, but actual problems with which she must grapple, and upon the solution of which she must concentrate all her strength. To-morrow, or the next day at the latest, the earth would close for ever over what remained of those poor beings whose departure from life had saddened her own and made it seem so hard to understand. But when the three were buried, she could no longer remain at Greifenstein. There would be no reason for prolonging her stay, even had she wished to do so, and indeed her wishes would lead her homewards as soon as her duties were all fulfilled. She had never before been separated even for a day from her child, and though she was strong

and sensible in mind and knew that Hilda was safe with old Berbel, she was conscious that it was painful to be away from her. She would therefore return to Sigmundskron. From that moment her trouble would begin. It was not conceivable that Greif should go away without seeing Hilda, and yet there were many reasons why it would be better that the two should not meet.

She had foreseen the struggle during the hours of the night, but it had not then appeared so formidable as now. She had then thought more of Greif, and it had not seemed impossible to tell him frankly what she felt. As she reflected upon what must be done, she saw that Hilda was the principal figure in the situation, and she realised that Hilda's happiness was infinitely more dear to her than anything else in the world. She hesitated, and for some time she told herself that the marriage must take place, come what might.

To her, all that had happened since the previous evening was shrouded in an

impenetrable mystery. Her imagination failed utterly to account for the desperate doings of which the horrible result was before her. She could have understood that the two brothers might have quarrelled on meeting after so many years, and that in a moment of reckless anger they should have shot each other. Clara might have perished in the struggle, while endeavouring to part them. But there was a dreadful appearance of deliberate intention in the whole tragedy which made such a hypothesis untenable. That Clara had been intentionally murdered, she could not doubt. Greifenstein might have slain her in a fit of passion and might have taken his own life afterwards, but this could not account for Rieseneck's suicide. She could have believed that for some unknown reason Rieseneck had killed his brother and Clara, and after disposing their bodies as they were found, had shot himself. But the examination proved the contrary. It was plainly evident that both men had died in their chairs by the weapons found in their own hands.

Rieseneck had written to his son, but Greifenstein had not, or, at least, if he had written anything it had not been discovered. Rex alone could know the secret, therefore, if it had been revealed at all. She was ignorant that in Germany, when a suicide has been committed, the law has a right to see whatever letters were last written by the deceased. The stamped letter, addressed to Rex, had attracted her attention, and she had taken it from the table with the intention of posting it the next day, not meaning to conceal it, but, on the contrary, to send it without delay to its destination. The legal gentlemen, courteous to the good lady, had not pressed her with any questions, taking it for granted that if she had found any letter or any clue to an explanation she would naturally offer it at once. And so it chanced that Rex alone could know the truth if any one knew it. That he had been terribly moved by what he had read, she had seen for herself, but whether the letter had contained a full explanation of the circumstances, it was not possible to judge. If so,

it was more than probable, she thought, that Rex would show it to Greif in due time, and that when the first shock was over the contents would be communicated to herself. The question was whether this would happen before Greif saw Hilda. In spite of her natural repugnance to such a plan, she almost resolved to ask Rex directly whether what he had received threw any light upon the situation. If she could know why those three persons were dead she could better guide her course in the future.

If Greifenstein had been a murderer, as well as a suicide, his son could not have Hilda for his wife. It was Greif's misfortune, and the baroness gave him all the pity she could spare from her own child, but the point could not be yielded. She closed her eyes and tried to think it over. She thought of Hilda, married and leaving Sigmundskron to live under the very roof where such deeds had been done, and the mere idea was painful and repugnant. Greif was wholly innocent of all that had happened, but the stain was upon his name,

and the blood of his father was in his veins. Hilda's children would be the grandchildren of a murderer. Old Greifenstein had not ended his days in a shameful prison, merely because he had found courage to take his own life quickly. But if he had done the deed he was a common murderer, and the moral result was the same, whether he were alive or dead; the indelible disgrace rested upon his son, and would brand the lives of his son's sons after him. Hilda loved Greif, and Greif loved Hilda, but that was no argument. Better that Hilda should drag out a solitary and childless existence than be happy under such a name; far better that Greif should submit to half a century of lonely and loveless years, than get children whose names should perpetuate the remembrance of a monstrous crime. Hilda would suffer, but suffering was the lot of mankind. The baroness wondered sadly whether her daughter's disappointment could possibly equal what she herself had borne on that day when her gallant soldier-husband had been shot down in

battle. Could Hilda's sorrow be like her own? Even if it were, Hilda must bear it rather than take such a name—unless, indeed, old Greifenstein had been innocent of his wife's death. No one could know that except Rex, and would he answer her question? In her horror of the whole situation she wished that she might go back to Sigmundskron and end her life in barely decent poverty with Hilda, and never again think of the marriage. But her rigid sense of duty reproached her for such a thought, which made her feel as though she were trying to lay down the responsibility that had fallen to her lot. Her untiring conscience took up the burden again, to bear it as it might.

Rex must answer her, and upon his answer would depend everything. It was not an easy matter to question him, however, and for the present it was wholly impossible. She must meet Hilda while she herself was yet undecided, so that it seemed simplest to be roughly frank with the girl, to tell her plainly what had happened, what

was known and the extent of what no one knew, showing her clearly that if old Greifenstein should turn out to have been guilty, she must give up all thought of Greif and submit to her poor lot with the best grace she could. Greif would go away and travel, perhaps for several years. He would find interests at last, which might help him to forget his darkened youth. Hilda and her mother would live as they could, and when the mother died Sigmundskron must go to the hammer. At all events it was not encumbered with debts, and its sale would leave the child a pittance to save her from starvation; possibly she would have more than before, but Frau von Sigmundskron could not judge of that. Possibly, too, Hilda's sixty-four quarterings would help her to gain admittance as a lady-canoness in one of those semi-religious foundations, reserved exclusively for the old nobility, of which several exist in Germany.

The short winter's day was over when Frau von Sigmundskron reached this stage

in her meditations. Lights were brought to the room where she was, and a servant came to ask her what she would eat. She scarcely knew what she answered, but she remembered that some hours had passed since she had been to see Greif or Rex and she roused herself to go upon the errand of inquiry. In the corridor she was met by another person who came to ask about the dispositions for the morrow, an ominous creature in black, the sight of whom recalled at once the hideous realities of the day, from which her mind had wandered in her anxiety for Hilda's welfare. She gave the necessary directions and continued upon her way.

'Come in,' said Greif's voice as she knocked cautiously at the door.

As soon as she entered she saw that his state had been improved by the rest he had taken. His eyes were quiet, his colour pale but natural, his manner mournfully calm. In the morning she had feared he might fall into a delirious fever.

Frau von Sigmundskron came and stood

beside him. He was comforted by her presence, though he had not always been sure that he liked her. At present, he knew what good cause he had to be grateful to her for what she had done, and he felt that she was his only relation in the world, the only woman alive who could in any way take the place of what he had lost. If he had not been very fond of her before, it was because he had not understood her, and because in his eyes her personality was entirely eclipsed by Hilda's. He put out his hand and took hers, and pressed it gently.

'You are very good,' he said. 'I am glad you have come.'

She sat down beside his easy-chair and gazed into the fire. There was no light in the room save that of the pine logs, blazing in the great chimney. Her reflexions of ten minutes earlier seemed very far away, for the sight of him and the sound of his voice had suddenly recalled those hopes for Hilda from which she had got so much happiness.

'You have slept,' she said. 'I am glad, for you needed rest.'

She did not know what to say, and there was a pause before she spoke again, during which Greif did not move. Unconsciously he had taken the manner of one ill, and lay back in his seat, his eyes half closed, his hands resting upon the arms of the chair, making no effort and only hoping that none would be required of him.

'Dear Greif,' said the baroness at last, 'you will go away, will you not?'

He started a little and his expression changed, as though the question pained him.

'Yes,' he answered. 'I will go away—when it is over.'

'Shall it be to-morrow, then?' asked Frau von Sigmundskron very softly.

'Yes. To-morrow morning. I would it were to-night. And then——' he stopped and passed his hand wearily across his forehead, letting it drop nervelessly by his side almost immediately.

'And then?'

'Then I must see Hilda before I go.' His eyelids quivered, and his lips shut themselves closely.

'Yes,' answered the baroness in a tone of hesitation.

'Yes, I must see Hilda,' Greif repeated. 'And when I am gone—then—then——'

This time Frau von Sigmundskron said nothing, for she saw that he was suffering, though she dared not guess what was passing in his mind. He seemed to be trying to speak.

'When I am gone——' he began, but the words died on his lips.

'Do not talk of this now, dear Greif.'

He roused himself and sat straight in his chair. There was something of his father's look in his face, and his companion noticed that his fingers were strained as he grasped the carved wood in the effort to steady himself.

'I must say it now,' he answered firmly. 'To-morrow I shall not be able to talk much, and it may happen that we shall never have another opportunity.'

'Never?'

'Perhaps never. It is to be good-bye. You must find another husband for Hilda, for I may not come back. That is what I wanted to say.'

The baroness turned a startled look upon him and leant forwards toward him from her seat. She had not expected such a turn in the drama.

'You do not suppose that I, an honourable man, would expect you to give your daughter to the son of a murderer?'

The question was put so sharply and concisely that Frau von Sigmundskron was taken unawares. The thought had been painful enough when it had passed unspoken through the confusion of her reflexions, but Greif's statement gave it a new and horrible vividness. With a single sharp sob, she hid her face in her hands, and Grief saw that they trembled. His own heart was beating violently, for he had nerved himself to make the effort, but he had not anticipated the reaction that followed closely upon it. He felt as though, in pronouncing the detested

word, he had struck his father's dead face with his hand.

'God knows how I loved him,' he said, under his breath. 'But he did the deed.'

Frau von Sigmundskron did not distinguish the words he spoke, but she felt that she must say something. Her hands dropped from her strained and tearless eyes and fell upon her knees.

'O Greif! Greif!' she almost moaned, as she stared at the blazing logs.

'That is what it comes to in the end,' he answered, summoning all his courage. 'I cannot marry Hilda. It was bad enough to be half disgraced by my father's brother—you were kind enough to set that aside. It is worse now, for the stain is on the name itself. I cannot give it to Hilda. Would you have her called Greifenstein?'

The baroness could not speak. Half an hour earlier she would not have dared to hope that Greif would himself renounce her daughter, but it was different now. She could not look upon his agonised face, and listen to the tones that came from his tor-

tured heart, as he gave up all he held dear for the sake of acting honourably, she could not see his suffering and hear his words, and yet brutally admit that he was right, and that his sacrifice was a necessity. And yet her own conscience told her that her first thought must be for her own child, and not for him. She stared at the fire and answered nothing.

'Would you have her write her name "Hilda von Greifenstein"?' he asked, forcing the words sternly from his lips. 'Would you have her angel purity darkened with the blood that is on my house?'

'But you, Greif—what will become of you?'

'It matters little enough, so that I do no harm to those I love,' he answered.

'It does matter,' said the baroness gently. 'It is not right or just that an innocent man should suffer for the deeds of others.'

'It is right that he should suffer anything, rather than injure those who are not only innocent but free from inherited reproach.'

There was a sudden energy in his manner

which surprised his companion. His white face was illuminated by a sort of radiance from within, his voice was full and firm, the glance of his eyes piercing and determined.

'It is right,' he continued, 'and I will do it, come what may. Indeed I must, for in spite of your kind heart and words you would not give her to me. But even if you would, I would not take her, I would not make her the mother of more Greifensteins. Ay—you look at me—I love her too much. That is the reason. If I loved her less—oh, then, I would take her. I would take my beautiful Hilda for my own sake, and in her love I would try and forget the horrors of my younger years. I would forget, for my own sake, that my father was a murderer and a suicide, my father's brother a shameful traitor, myself a man clothed in the infamy of others, until the world can hardly distinguish between my innocence and their guilt. I could live with Hilda, somewhere in this lonely forest, and with her I might bury memory and talk lightly of love beside its very grave. And Hilda

would be willing, too, and if I did not love her as I do, I would take her—whether you would let her go or not—no, forgive me—I should not speak so to you, who are the best of women—but you would consent, for you are so kind. But the thing is impossible. She would remember, and I should remember also, when our sons grew up and had to meet the world with the brand of our name upon their faces. Look at Rex. He is my best friend. Yesterday I learnt that he is my cousin. Even he has hidden his father's deeds under a common, meaningless name. How much more should I hide my head! How much less right have I, than he had yesterday, to make an innocent girl, or any woman, the wife of a Greifenstein! No—go to Hilda, tell her the truth, let me see her once, and I will rid you of myself when I have said good-bye. You are her mother, and you alone can tell her all—all except the last word, and when I have spoken that word, I will go away, Rex and I together, and you will not hear of me any more.'

Greif ceased speaking. He had risen from

his chair to pace the room while he spoke and he now stood with folded arms before the baroness, his eyes fixed on hers as though waiting for her answer. He was very young, and it was perhaps the first time in his life that he had spoken out before any one. He was too much excited to think whether his speech would sound theatrical and exaggerated or not. He meant every word of what he had said, and that was enough for him. He meant to do what was right and honourable, and that is enough for any man.

Frau von Sigmundskron's gentle eyes fell before his fixed gaze. Feeling as she did, and remembering what she had felt when she had come to him, she was ashamed to meet his earnest glance. There were few better women in the world, few whose goodness showed itself so clearly both in deeds and intentions, and yet she was conscious, rightly or wrongly, that Greif was outdoing her in generosity. To her the words he had spoken had a ring of heroism in them, and he himself seemed to grow in dignity

and strength as he stood before her. She hesitated, the speech came to her lips, failed, took courage and came again. Once more she raised her head and looked into his eyes.

'Greif—you are a brave man, and you will understand me,' she said. 'When I came here, I felt all that you have said. I felt it in the long night, before you were in the house. I meant to tell you what you have told me, as kindly as I could, not now, but later. It would have been hard, for I am more than fond of you.'

'It would have been your duty, and it would have been right,' answered Greif calmly.

The baroness laid her hand upon his folded arms.

'It would not have been right, Greif,' she said in a low voice that trembled a little. 'It might have seemed so, for I did not know you as I know you now. You have done all that a man can do, more, perhaps, than almost any man would have done. I did not wrong you in what I felt, nor in what I meant to say, but I could never say

it now. Take Hilda, and call yourself as you will, for you are worthy of her and neither you nor she will ever regret it.'

Greif looked at her for a moment, and then knelt beside her and kissed her hands.

'You will,' she said, and there were tears in her eyes.

'I cannot,' he answered, in heartbroken accents. Then, rising, he stood and leaned against the chimney-piece and bowed his head against the carved wood.

He could not feel as she did, and his nature was incapable of such a sudden revulsion as had taken place in her heart. He knew how bravely generous she had been, but her kindness changed nothing in the situation, beyond awakening in him a sense of heartfelt gratitude for which he had expected no such cause as she had given. The fear of doing an injury to Hilda was still foremost in his mind. He had said that even if her mother would consent, he would not take her, and what he felt when that consent was so unexpectedly thrust upon him was a measure of his earnestness.

'Nothing is spared me,' he said, almost under his breath. 'Not even your generosity!'

His action was to depend wholly upon his own free will, and he knew that it would have been far easier to renounce his love if Hilda's mother had helped him with her opposition. There she sat, offering him what he must not take, thrusting upon him that which his whole nature craved, and which his honour alone bid him refuse. Her sweet voice sounded like the soft music of temptation.

'Do not say so, Greif,' she said. 'Remember that you are wholly innocent, and that Hilda loves you with all her heart and soul. Why must you force yourself to do what will make her and me so unspeakably wretched? After all—I take the most worldly argument—it is for her and for me to decide. You have concealed nothing, and I know all, and if I say that your goodness and your heroism outweigh the rest, should you not be satisfied? And besides, you are young. You do not know how very quickly

the world forgets. A score of years hence, who will remember the evil deeds of last night? They were not even done in a city, those who did them had hardly any acquaintances, and perhaps no friends. You yourself are not old enough to be known to many, and you can live here until your children are grown up. It seems to me that I was wrong even to have thought of separating you two, wholly wrong and mistaken and that I ought to ask your forgiveness for my intention.'

Thus she pleaded the cause of his own heart, giving many and good reasons why he should yield, while he stood struggling with himself and wishing that he could stop his ears against her persuasion. To him the horror was more vivid than to her, and she could not understand his dread of associating Hilda with the curse that had fallen upon his house.

'I cannot,' he said firmly, when she had ceased speaking.

She rose and stood beside him.

'Think of it, Greif,' she answered. 'You

must not break her heart for a scruple of honour.'

Then she went out softly, wondering at herself, but sure that she had done the best.

## CHAPTER XVI

Frau von Sigmundskron was too conscientious a person to omit a mental review of what had passed. She knew, indeed, that she had acted kindly and generously, if not wisely, and she believed that in some cases kindness might be better than wisdom. She was struck by one point in Greif's language. He assumed as a certainty that old Greifenstein had killed Clara, whereas the baroness had been inclined to attribute the crime to Rieseneck alone. At first she did not understand Greif's readiness to believe that this evil deed had been his father's, but presently, as she thought over the whole matter, it struck her that she had no reason for acquitting the one rather than the other, so far as evidence was concerned, but that

she had wished Greif's father innocent for Greif's own sake. The good lady was much disturbed on finding that her wishes had been strong enough to bias her mental view without her knowledge, and she grew more and more satisfied with the course she had pursued after Greif had spoken. She saw clearly, now, that Greif was indispensable to her for Hilda's happiness, and she comprehended that he was worthy of the girl.

In the wicked world which surrounded the Black Forest on all sides, persons would have been found malicious enough to suspect that Greif really wished to be free from his engagement with Hilda. He himself, had he been less excited, would have hesitated before speaking as he had done, lest such a motive should be attributed to him. He would have acted and talked with more diplomacy and less outward energy, though with the same inward conviction, and it is by no means impossible that Frau von Sigmundskron's first intention might in such a case have remained unchanged, and that she would have gently acquiesced in Greif's

proposal to give up the marriage. But there was no guile in the baroness, and but little in Greif himself. He had been carried away in his speech by the sincerity of what he felt, the more easily because his whole nature was unstrung by grief; and Hilda's mother had seen in him only the hero, ready to sacrifice everything for her he loved, and woman-like, she had felt irresistibly impelled to reward him on the spot by a generous sacrifice of those convictions which his real or fancied eloquence had already destroyed. So simple was she, that it did not strike her that Greif's own position was changed, that he was all at once his own master, possessed of a large fortune and perhaps of tastes which he had concealed during his father's life. If the aforesaid wicked world had been acquainted with the circumstances, it would assuredly have taken this view into consideration. But that portion of mankind in which are included so many of our acquaintance, but in whose numbers we ourselves are never found, were very far from Greifenstein, and the Lady of Sigmundskron knew little

of their modes of thought. She saw that Greif was honest and she sought no malicious explanation of his intentions. On the contrary, the longer she reflected upon the interview, the more she admired him, and strange to say, the nearer she came to accepting his opinion of his father's guilt.

She had meant to see Rex, and she had not been altogether decided to wait and allow the natural course of events to bring her the information she desired about his letter. She remembered with some surprise that her decision in the matter of the marriage was to have depended upon the knowledge of old Greifenstein's culpability or innocence which she had hoped to gain from Rex. It was evident that her mind was tired, and she resolved at last to rest. It was her duty, however, to see Rex before sleeping, if only to inquire about his state. She would certainly not ask him any questions.

She found him reading still, or pretending to read, by the light of a shaded student's lamp. Upon another table there was a tray with a couple of covered dishes upon it.

His older and tougher nature showed itself there, she thought, for he must have given the order himself. He rose politely as she entered, and offered her a chair. His manner contrasted so strongly with Greif's, as to make her wonder whether he were in reality much affected or not.

'I will not stay,' she said. 'I only came to see how you were, and whether I could do anything for you.'

'You are very kind. I have all I need, and more. Have you seen Greif?'

'Yes. He has slept and I think he is safe. At first I feared lest his mind should be affected. He is younger than you, Herr von—Herr Rex—and perhaps he is more sensitive.'

'Perhaps,' replied Rex thoughtfully. 'Would he care to see me?'

'I have no doubt—that is—he may possibly be tired——' she hesitated.

Rex's stony eyes examined her face attentively.

'You have had an interview with him,' he said in a tone of conviction, 'and you

have talked about this dreadful matter. I have a communication to make to you, Frau von Sigmundskron. It will not take long.'

The baroness started and looked at him earnestly.

'What is it?' she asked.

'You gave me a letter this morning. I will tell you frankly that you ought to have given it to the representatives of the law, for in such cases the law has a right to all letters of the deceased, and can even cause them to be intercepted in the post-office.'

'I did not know,' she replied, in some perturbation.

'I did, but as no one asked me for the letter, I did not offer it. I cannot tell you all it contained, nor shall I tell Greif. But this I will tell you. My father arrived here last night, and almost immediately afterwards he and Herr von Greifenstein, jointly, killed Frau von Greifenstein, and then committed suicide.'

'Is there no doubt?' asked the baroness nervously. She turned white at the thought of the scene his words recalled.

'The last confessions of men about to die are generally trustworthy,' remarked Rex rather drily.

'Of course—of course.' She wondered what other communication the letter had contained.

'Exactly, and you may rely upon the exactness of what I tell you. My poor father had no reason for deceiving me, nor was he a man to deceive any one. He had been a fanatic and an enthusiast in his youth, and if his fanaticism led him too far, he paid the penalty in forty years of exile.'

'But what could have induced him—or Greifenstein——'

'Madam,' said Rex courteously, but firmly, 'I regret my inability to answer your question. It must be supposed that two such men had some cause for acting as they did, which seemed to them sufficient.'

'Forgive me!' exclaimed the baroness. 'I did not mean to ask you. I thank you for having told me what you have. Am I to tell Greif? I think—indeed I know that what he believes coincides with your account.'

'Then you had better say nothing. I could not show him the letter, and if he knew that there was one, he might naturally enough reproach me with a want of confidence in him. I should be sorry to be placed in such a position, at such a time.'

For a few moments neither spoke. The baroness was formulating another question, which must be put to her companion.

'Herr Rex,' she said at last, 'it is necessary that the last act of this tragedy should be completed to-morrow. You have a voice in the matter——' she hesitated.

'Whatever you do will be well done,' answered Rex. He seemed to think the question over quickly. 'If you have any objections to his resting here,' he said presently, 'I will take him away. Do not let any feeling of delicacy prevent you from being frank.'

'Let them lie together,' replied Frau von Sigmundskron. 'It would be Greif's wish. You are very thoughtful, Herr Rex, but you must not think that any such unkind feeling can exist any longer now. Though

there is no real tie of blood, you are one of us. You and Greif should be as brothers.'

A momentary light flashed in Rex's impenetrable eyes.

'I will be a brother to him, if he will let me,' he answered steadily. 'I thank you very much for what you have done and for what you say.'

Frau von Sigmundskron bade him good-night and went away. She was a woman, and her curiosity was strong, though her conscience was stronger. She felt that she was in the presence of some extraordinary mystery, and that Rex himself was a somewhat mysterious personage. His eyes haunted her and disturbed her peace, and yet she could not deny that she was attracted by him. His quiet dignity pleased her, as well as the tone of his voice. She liked his face and its expression, and her deep-rooted prejudices of caste were satisfied, for she recognised in him a man essentially of her own class. There was something very manly, too, about his bearing, which could not fail to impress a womanly woman,

no matter of what age. But his eyes followed her and seemed to stare stonily at her out of the dark corners of the room. She was too much exhausted, however, to resist very long the oppression of sleep that came over her, and she was far too tired to dream, or at least to be conscious of dreaming.

With the following morning came the last trial of her strength, and those who saw her wondered how a thin, pale woman, whose hair was already white, could show such constant energy, forethought and endurance. She had led a hard life, however, harder than any one there suspected, and she could have borne even more than was thrust upon her, without flinching or bending under the burden. On foot she walked in the mournful procession through the snow and the bitter wind, leaning but lightly on Greif's arm, and sometimes feeling that she was helping him rather than accepting his assistance. It was nearly a quarter of a mile from the castle to the spot where the burial-place of the Greifensteins was built in the depth of the forest, and the road was bad in many

parts, though an attempt had been made to clear it, and the footsteps of those who bore the dead smoothed the path for the living who came after.

At last it was over. The last short prayer was said. The great stone slab, green with the mould of centuries, was raised by twenty strong arms and was made to slide back into its place above the yawning steps that led down into the earth, the heavy doors of the mausoleum swung slowly upon their hinges, the huge, rusty lock was secured and the unwieldy key was solemnly placed in the hands of the new master of Greifenstein. With slow steps, two and two together, all went back through the dim shadows of the trees, while the icy wind whistled and roared upon them from every giant stem, and the trodden snow creaked beneath their feet. Two and two they re-entered the low gateway of the castle, till the iron-studded oak clanged behind the last pair, sending rolling echoes along the dark, vaulted way.

An hour later Greif and Rex sat together

in sad silence before the big blazing logs in Greif's room, faintly conscious of the comforting warmth, looking at each other from time to time without speaking, each absorbed by the pain of his own thoughts. It seemed as though several hours had passed in this way when Greif at last broke the silence.

'I will ride to Sigmundskron to-morrow,' he said, 'and then we will go away.'

Rex looked at him, nodded gravely and answered nothing.

'We must go together, Rex,' said Greif after another long pause. 'Will you come?'

'I will go with you wherever you will. If we part it shall not be my fault.'

'Thank you.'

The great logs crackled and blazed, sending up leaping flames and showers of sparks into the wide chimney and reflecting a warm red glare which contrasted oddly with the cold and sunless light of the winter's afternoon. The sound and the sight of the fire supplied the place of conversation and animated the stillness.

'Rex, did you know that I was to have been married next month?' Greif asked the question suddenly, as though he had come to an unexpected decision.

'I thought it possible that you would marry soon,' answered his companion.

'I was to have been married to my cousin Hilda in January. How far away that seems!'

'The daughter of Frau von Sigmundskron?'

'Yes. We have been engaged for years.'

'And you are going to Sigmundskron to see her—to tell her——'

'That it is all over.' Greif completed the sentence.

Rex rested his elbows on his knees and leaned forward, staring at the fire. He knew what Greif meant without any further explanation, and he realised how much more his cousin would stand in need of comfort than before. But his active and far-sighted intelligence did not accept the necessity of breaking off the marriage. He approved of Greif's wish to do so, and

admired his courage, but at the same time he saw the utter desolation and gloominess of the life in store for him if he persisted in his intention. He held his peace, however.

'You see that I could not do otherwise,' Greif said at last. Still Rex answered nothing, and stared persistently into the flames, though his cousin was looking at him.

'Would you,' continued Greif, 'if you were in my place, have the courage to offer such a name as mine to an innocent girl?'

'You are as innocent as she,' observed Rex.

'Personally, but that is not the question. Would you bring her here to live in this house, to be a part of all the evil that has befallen me and mine?'

'You can live where you please,' said Rex philosophically. 'And besides, by a very simple process of law you can call yourself by another name. Do away with the name and live in another place, and you are simply Greif and she is simply Hilda. There could be no question of doing her an

injury. Names are foolish distinctions at best, and when there is anything wrong with them it is foolish not to get rid of them at once. Do you think that I would not marry as plain Herr Rex, though I am in reality the high and well-born Horst von Rieseneck? I have but to make application for a legal change, pay the costs and the thing is done.'

'Outwardly, it is true. But the fact would remain. You are Rieseneck and I am Greifenstein, for all our lives, and our children will be Rieseneeks and Greifensteins after us, if we marry. I would not lay such a curse upon any woman, much less upon one I love.'

'A curse is a purely conventional term, having no real meaning in life,' replied Rex. 'The reality is you yourself, your love and her love, whether you be the Emperor or Herr Schmidt. At least that is all the reality which can ever affect either of you, so far as marriage is concerned. I do not say that your name, or mine, would not be a disadvantage if we were ambitious men

and if we wanted to be statesmen or officers. But I do assert that no sensible person will blame you or me for marrying happily if we have the opportunity, merely because our fathers did evil in their day.'

Greif listened attentively, but shook his head.

'It is strange that you should not think as I do about this,' he answered. 'We think alike about most things. But you need not try to persuade me against my will. I will not yield.'

'Will you take my advice about a smaller matter?'

'If I can.'

'Then listen to me. Do not be hasty. If you must see Fräulein von Sigmundskron to-morrow, do not let your parting be final. You may regret it all your life.'

'What would my regret be, compared with hers, if in the course of time she realised that she had done wrong in taking my name?'

'Are there any men of her family alive?' asked Rex. 'Is there any other branch?'

'No—if there were, they would never allow the marriage, even if I wished it.'

'I did not ask for that reason. If she is alone in the world, take her name. Call yourself Greif von Sigmundskron, and revive an ancient race without letting your own die out.'

Greif was silent. It had not struck him that such an arrangement might be possible, but he saw at a glance that Rex had dealt a telling blow against his resolution. To have married Hilda as Greifenstein would have always remained out of the question, to have chosen a common and meaningless appellation would have seemed an insult to her, but the idea suggested by Rex was alluring in the extreme. He knew how bitterly both Hilda and her mother regretted the extinction of their family and how gladly they would welcome such a proposal. By one stroke of the pen Greifenstein and its memories would be detached from his future life, and there would be something in their place, a name to make honourable, a home in which to plant new associations—

above all there would be the love, the pride, the happiness of Hilda herself. He felt that his determination was weakened, and he made a final effort not to yield, scarcely knowing why he resisted any longer, since the possibilities of the future had grown so suddenly bright. Rex saw at a glance that he had made a deep impression upon his cousin, and wisely left the remedy he had administered to take its effect gradually. He knew human nature too well to fear that Greif could ever shut his eyes to the prospect unveiled to him. Time must pass, and in passing must heal the gaping wound that was yet fresh. Every month would take the ghastly tragedy further away and bring more clearly to Greif's mind the hope of happiness. As for the rest, it was buried in Rex's heart and no power would ever draw from him the secret of his brother's birth. Rightly or wrongly, he swore to hold his tongue. He did not know to whom the great Greifenstein property would go if he told the world that Greif was a nameless orphan with no more claim to his father's

wealth than Rex himself. It seemed strange to be suggesting to Greif the means of discarding a name that never was his, but which must in all probability belong to some one who coveted it in spite of the associations it would soon have for all who heard the tale.

Rex sat in silence thinking over the almost endless intricacies of the situation, and wondering what would have happened if that letter had fallen into the hands of the law, and what would have become of Greif. He would have been absolutely penniless. Not even his mother's heritage, if there were any, would have belonged to him, for Rex could have claimed it as his own. He looked at the handsome face of his cousin, and tried to imagine what its expression would have been, if all things had taken place legally, and if Greif had received only what was his due. The sensation of preserving so much to any one by merely keeping silence was strange to Rex. He did not know whether he himself might not be considered a party in a fraud if the

matter were tried before a tribunal, though he had not spoken one untrue word in the whole affair. Verily, silence was gold. To Greif, Rex's silence was almost equivalent to life itself. One word could deprive him of everything, of Greifenstein, of his name, of every item and miserable object he possessed, as well as of the broad lands and the accumulated money. He would lose all, but in whose favour? Rex did not know. Perhaps the lawful heir of Greifenstein was a poor officer of foot in a third-rate garrison town, eking out his pay with the remains of a meagre inheritance, desperately poor, and as desperately honourable. Possibly there was a connexion with some great and powerful family, into his full hands everything would go, if the truth were known. Possibly—Rex stopped short in his train of thought, astonished that he should not have sooner hit upon the fact—possibly Frau von Sigmundskron and her daughter were the only living relations. It seemed almost certain that this must be the case, when he thought about it. And if so

—if he held his peace, and if Greif persisted in not marrying Hilda—why then he, Rex, was keeping that gentle, half-saintly old lady out of her rights. The new confusion caused by the idea was so great that even Rex's tough brain was disturbed. His instinct told him that the Sigmundskrons were poor—perhaps they were in real want. If he said nothing, if Greif persisted, if in later years Greif married another wife, as was most likely and possible, what sufferings might the man who had brought this about be responsible for! And yet, what a prospect, if he should take his letter from his pocket-book and hand it to Greif, as they sat side by side in the quiet room before the open fire! He had meant to burn the scrap of paper. It would be easy to toss it into the flames before Greif's eyes. But if ever all those things should happen of which he had been thinking, what proof would remain that the baroness or her daughter had a right to what was theirs even now? If ever that time came, Greif would not believe a spoken word. Would

it not have been best, after all, to give the writing to the men of the law, requesting their discretion? No, for all this might be spared, if only Greif married Hilda. Until he had realised what issues were at stake, Rex had been satisfied with the suggestion he had made to Greif, believing that it would ultimately bear fruit in the desired result. Now, however, it seemed insufficient and wholly inadequate to the importance of the case. Greif must marry Hilda, and the letter must not be destroyed, for it might prove a valuable instrument with which to hasten or direct the march of events. After all — were the Sigmundskrons the only relations?

The idea that they were the only heirs-at-law had presented itself so forcibly that the sudden doubt concerning the fact made Rex desperate. There was no difficulty, however, in ascertaining the truth from Greif himself and without rousing his suspicions. It was even natural that Rex should ask the question, considering what had gone before.

'Have you no other relations, besides the Sigmundskrons, Greif?' he asked.

'None but you yourself.'

'I am not counted, as the connexion is in the female line,' said Rex calmly. 'I mean, if you were to die, the Sigmundskrons would be the heirs, unless you married and had children, would they not?'

'Yes—I suppose they would. I had not thought of it.'

'It seems to me that this constitutes an additional argument in favour of the plan I suggested.'

Greif did not answer at once, for he felt the weight of Rex's words, though he did not understand the whole intention of his cousin.

'I cannot argue with you now,' he said at last, as though wishing to be left to his thoughts.

Rex was too wise to be annoyed, for he saw that Greif's refusal to discuss the matter any further was the result of his inclination to yield, rather than of a hardening determination. The only point immediately

important to Rex was that the marriage should not be broken off abruptly at once. He did not know what Hilda's nature might be, and this was an uncertain element in his calculations. It was certainly most probable that if she loved Greif sincerely she would not part with him easily, nor suffer him to sacrifice himself without making a desperate effort to hold him back. On the other hand, and for all Rex knew, Hilda might be a foolishly sentimental, half-frivolous nonentity, who would take offence at the first word which spoke of parting and consider herself insulted by Greif's chivalrous determination. She might be a suspicious girl, who would immediately be attacked with jealousy and would imagine that Greif loved another and wished to be free from herself. On the whole, Rex, in his worldly wisdom, thought it improbable that Hilda would turn out to be sincere, simple and loving, whereas for her own interest it was important that she should possess these qualifications. Lastly, Rex reflected that Hilda might very well be a selfish, reticent,

scheming young woman, who would know how to manage Greif as though he were a child. He almost wished that she might have enough worldly guile to cling to Greif for his fortune as well as for his love—anything, rather than that the marriage should be broken off.

If that disaster occurred, if by Greif's impatient desire to be generous to the extreme limit of what honour could demand, or by Hilda von Sigmundskron's possible lack of affection or of wisdom, the two were to be permanently separated, Rex confessed that he should not know what to do. His own position would in that case be very far from enviable, for he would certainly have been a party in a fraud, of which the practical result had been that the Sigmundskrons were kept out of their property. The moral point presented to his conscience was an extremely delicate one to decide. His nature, as well as his education, impelled him to tell the truth regardless of all consequences, for its own sake; but the question arose, whether he was bound to

tell what he knew, when no one asked him for the information. When the consequences might be so tremendous, and when the least effect that could be anticipated must be the immediate ruin of his brother, he believed that he should be justified in his silence, provided that those who would legitimately profit by the secret he withheld should receive all the advantages to which they were entitled. It seemed to him a case in which his conscience must gamble upon the probabilities. If it turned out well, he might congratulate himself upon having produced much happiness; if he lost the game, he must endure the humiliation of being obliged to communicate the truth to both parties. It would have been far easier, if he had been called upon to induce Greif to make an apparent sacrifice for the sake of a good he could not understand. The young man's noble disposition was more easily led in the direction of chivalrous self-renunciation, than towards an end involving personal advantage. Indeed Greif would almost invariably have chosen to give rather

than to receive. The present difficulty consisted in making him take Hilda, in order that he might unconsciously give her what was hers. At first Rex had considered only Greif's happiness; now, he must think before all things of Hilda's fortune. He knew Greif well enough to be sure that if the marriage were broken off, he would certainly bestow a considerable portion upon the Sigmundskrons if they were really poor, but this could not be enough. Either Hilda must have all that was hers, by marrying Greif, or Rex must tell the story and precipitate the catastrophe. The only condition of his concealing what he knew, was that every one except himself should gain by his reticence. If this could not be accomplished, justice must be done in spite of the consequences.

Though Rex's blood was German, his character had suffered a certain modification by the manner of his bringing up. His mode of thought certainly differed from Greif's to an extent which could not be accounted for upon the ground of tempera-

ment alone. Brave, manly and sufficiently generous though he was, Rex undeniably had a preference for accomplishing his ends mysteriously and by diplomatic means, a characteristic more southern than northern, and assuredly not German. He was a man well able to sustain whatever part he chose to play, and it was at least to his credit that he never employed his remarkable powers of concealment to a bad purpose. In his place, Greif would have told everything, and would then have offered everything he possessed to compensate the mischief done by the truth; he would not have been able to hide what he knew for a week, in such a case, for his extreme love of frankness would have tortured him until it was out, but if there were no justice to be accomplished, he could have held his peace as well as another. Rex saw far and clearly before him. His sceptical mind could not accept the conventional traditions of truthfulness at any price, of honourable sentiment exaggerated to quixotism. He felt the necessity of weighing results before acting, rather than of

following moral precepts and letting the results take care of themselves. To him ultimate good was everything, and religious morality was an empty bubble, unless it could be made to contribute directly and clearly to a good result. With Greif's more simple and straightforward nature, truthfulness, and such virtues as go with it, were invested with all the superior importance which religion gives to each present act of life, and so far as the future was concerned, a semi-conscious faith in the efficacy of principle supplied the place of Rex's well-thought-out combinations and philosophical disquisitions about relative right and wrong.

## CHAPTER XVII

The effect of what Rex had said was to hasten Greif's action. After listening to his cousin's arguments, he felt that what was to be done must be done quickly, lest his courage should fail him. If he had been left to himself he would never have doubted his own strength, and would very possibly have waited a day or two before going to Sigmundskron to bid Hilda farewell. Now, however, he felt that to hesitate or delay would be fatal, and he resolved to lose no time in carrying out his intentions. In order to isolate himself more completely from all outward influences he would have sent Frau von Sigmundskron back alone and would have followed her a few hours later; but his sense of common decency, as

well as his profound gratitude, forbade such a course. He could not by any means avoid the long drive in her company, and he tried to harden his heart as he submitted to his destiny. It was certain that, unless she had changed her mind, she would talk of the matter of his visit, and would repeat in his unwilling ear all those arguments which appealed to his heart so strongly, and which so grievously shook his chivalrous resolution.

During the long night that succeeded the day of the funeral ceremony, the sorrow of the parting which was before him assumed such proportions as made the past seem less horrible, and the change from one kind of suffering to another afforded his exhausted nature a relief of which he was not conscious, but which was nevertheless very real. He himself could not understand how it had been possible for him to discuss with Rex matters so closely connected with his future happiness, scarcely an hour after the heavy gates of the mausoleum had closed upon the father he had so deeply loved, and upon the

mother he so tenderly regretted. For he did mourn for her sincerely, in spite of his earlier indifference. He was yet too near the catastrophe to attempt to explain it, but in the confusion of his grief her words came vividly to his mind. He recalled the expression of her face when she had implored him not to forsake her, whatever happened, and he knew that in some way she must, even then, have had a forewarning of her end. He remembered many strange incongruities in her manner, which he had once disliked intensely, but which now pointed to the existence of a secret in her quiet life, and which, having seemed contemptible when she had been alive, took a tragic importance now that she was gone. He recalled very clearly that morning when he had felt a thrill of pitying tenderness for the lonely woman, and when she had responded so suddenly and passionately to his simple words. He had never loved her, and had perhaps had little cause for any affection, but the suddenness and the horror of her death strengthened in him every

kind memory, and overshadowed by its dark presence whatever in her life had lacked dignity and worth.

As for his father, he had felt for him a passionate devotion of which he dared not think now. And yet he had been able to talk with Rex, if not freely, at least with a complete command of his faculties. He would have reproached himself with heartlessness, but when his thoughts dwelt upon those he had lost, he knew that the self-accusation was unmerited. Not comprehending what passed in his own mind, and finding himself face to face with a problem that seemed to involve his own life or death, it is not altogether surprising that he should have persisted in undergoing a self-imposed suffering which he almost unconsciously regarded as a test of heroism.

But as he did his best to fortify himself in his intention another power stood before him, not a gloomy presence of evil, not a sorrowful but relentless fate, not a thing in itself terrible, grand or heroic, and yet stronger and more real than any of those

other shadows which surrounded his life. He had not known that it was with him in such a shape, he had not realised what it would be to face that which has conquered all men sooner or later. The love of Hilda, which had softened all his youth, but which in its unopposed calm had seemed so gentle and tender that by an effort of his strong will he might put it off if he would, the quiet spirit of calm which had been with him so long, purifying his thoughts, simplifying his hopes for the future, encouraging him ever in each present day, the love of untarnished youth for spotless maidenhood rose up like the dawn upon a traveller in a strange land, shedding its universal light upon the secret places of his soul. It was a wonderful revelation of beauty appearing in the midst of his sorrow, contrasting the magnificence of its splendour with the darkness in which he would have hidden himself.

He groaned as he lay alone in his solitary chamber, and the passionate tears burst from his eyes. He had met at last that

which must vanquish all his resolutions, and turn all his desperate efforts into vanity. That sudden flash of radiance in the midst of his grief was but a dark shadow compared with the light of Hilda's face. If the mere thought of her made all resistance seem impossible, would he be able to go to her to-morrow and tell her that they must part? But it was not a mere thought, as he called it. He had thought of her for years, but never in this way; she had dwelt in his heart a long time, but he had never felt anything like this. It was true that he had never resisted her presence before. Could that be the reason? Could it be that love was a companion for the weakest of mankind, if kindly entertained, and yet, if resisted, the master of the very strongest? Greif in his pride of youth believed himself as strong as any, and the sensation of being thus utterly overpowered was crushing and humiliating. He would not yield, but he well knew that he was conquered beforehand, and must be led away captive in the end.

He sat up and tried to reason with himself. It was but an illusion after all, and it was just such an illusion as should strengthen his purpose. If Hilda were indeed, as she doubtless was, this exquisitely lovely creature, could anything be more contemptible than to give her a name which must be a reproach, a position in which her beautiful life must be made half shameful by the memory of hideous crimes?

Momentarily satisfied with himself, he once more laid his head upon the pillow, but he had hardly closed his eyes when Rex's suggestion flashed through his brain, and Hilda's clear voice seemed to cry 'Sigmundskron!' in his ears. The thought of bearing another name, of being no longer Greifenstein, of being the father of a new race in a new home, presented itself to him in all its attractions. After all, said Rex to his conscience, you are wholly innocent, and it is only the sound of the name to which you object or which you fear for her. Take hers and be happy under it, since you would be miserable under your own. After

all, one is as good as another, and it would be better to be plain Herr Rex than to throw over the joy of a lifetime for the sake of three syllables that have a disagreeable ring. Names are nonsense and a man's reputation is his own, not to be made or marred by his father's evil deeds. The Sigmundskrons know all, and it is for them to judge, not for you. If they will make you one of them, what right have you to make them unhappy for the sake of your own prejudices?

Greif was very young to cope with such difficulties, when even love itself was against him. Though Rex said little, that little was eloquent and full of practical sense, like many of Rex's sayings. Greif shed bitter tears and ground his teeth and wrung his hands.

'Hilda! Hilda!' he cried aloud in his solitude, 'what would you have me do, if you knew all, if you knew me, if you knew my heart!'

When a man appeals against his love to the woman who loves him, his resolutions

are at their last gasp for existence. Hilda answered his heart before the spoken words were out of his mouth.

'Love me, dear—that is all I ask!' It was as though her voice mingling with his own sounded aloud in the lonely room, and Greif started up, his eyes wide open, his breath caught upon his lips.

It was the merest illusion, but its vividness showed him the power of what produced it. He was struggling bravely for an idea, trying to do what seemed knightly, and noble, and high, and vanquished though he was, he would fight to the very end.

The cold, bright morning rose over the sombre trees and suddenly entered his chamber like the broad reflection of polished steel, a chilly glare of snow and cloudless sky seen through a window high above the earth in midwinter. Greif awoke from the broken slumber that had come to him at last, and looked anxiously about him. Somehow the sweet vision that had so much disturbed him, when he could see nothing real but the glow of the dying

embers on the hearth, was dissipated and gone under the cruelty of the icy daylight. With a heavy heart he rose and looked out upon the forest. From the place where he stood he could see the tall trees that surrounded the burial-ground of his race, and his eyes grew dark and gloomy as he thought of those who lay there. He was sadder and stronger than he had been a few hours ago. He would sit beside the baroness during the long drive to Sigmundskron, and what she might say would make no impression upon him, no more than the ringing of the horses' bells made upon the frozen snow. He would meet Hilda in the well-remembered sitting-room, and Hilda's mother would leave them alone. It would be cold there, for there was never much fire. She would perhaps be pale—a little pale, and her eyes would be cast down. She would sit upon one side of the stone chimney-piece, and he would stand upon the other. There would be a moment's pause, and then he would tell her everything. It could not last long, and when it

was over he would have conquered in the struggle.

He would drive back alone in the late afternoon through the dismal forest. To-morrow he would leave Greifenstein and go to his lawyer in the city. Half of his fortune should be Hilda's, and she should restore Sigmundskron and marry whomsoever she would. Then he would be free, and he would go away with Rex to some distant country, not to return for half a lifetime, if he ever returned at all.

The plan was simple, comprehensive and satisfactory. Nothing remained but to put it into immediate execution. He had given the necessary orders on the previous night, and, as soon as Frau von Sigmundskron was ready, they would start upon their drive. He finished dressing and went in search of Rex. The latter looked even more pale and disturbed than Greif himself, though with characteristic determination he was attempting to eat his breakfast.

'I am going to Sigmundskron,' said Greif, entering the room. 'Will you wait for me

here? To-morrow we will go away, or to-night, if you like.'

'I will wait willingly. Where should I go?' Rex rose, pushing the silver salver away from him.

'Very good. I shall be back at dusk. Good-bye.' Greif held out his hand in evident anxiety to get away, for he did not want to hear any more of his cousin's plausible reasoning, and dreaded lest Rex should broach the subject of his errand. But the latter detained him in spite of himself.

'Do nothing rash or hasty, Greif,' he said earnestly. 'A life's happiness is easily thrown away, and hardly found again when you have parted with it—and more than half of life's happiness is the love of woman. Good-bye.'

Greif made his escape as quickly as he could, but Rex had found time and words to touch the strongest chord in his heart. As he descended the stairs he felt again something of the influence that had visited him in the night, and he wished that he

had not gone to Rex's room before leaving the house.

The sight of Frau von Sigmundskron, wrapped in her dark mantle for the journey, recalled him to himself. Her kind eyes looked at him almost lovingly from beneath the hood that covered her white hair, as he bent and kissed her hand. Neither spoke as they gained the court and got into the carriage, but while Greif was wrapping her in the heavy furs and arranging a cushion behind her, he felt that she meant to do all she could to dissuade him from his intention on the way, and he knew that the real struggle was yet to come. Then Rex appeared again, bareheaded, to bid farewell to the baroness and to say a few words of heartfelt thanks. He alone knew how much both he and Greif owed to her discretion; far more than she dreamed of, as she answered him and gave him her hand.

The horses plunged forward, their hoofs clashing noisily upon the pavement of the court; out of the bright light the carriage disappeared into the darkness of the gate-

way and as quickly rolled out again upon the dazzling snow beyond. After that there would be snow and trees and rocks, and rocks and trees and snow, until the grey towers of Sigmundskron loomed up above the tops of the firs.

Greif leaned back in silence, as they spun over the white road. Every moment now was a moment gained, provided that nothing were said to weaken his purpose. He braced himself in his seat, with his feet and his back, as though he expected the carriage to upset, and closed his lips tightly as if to meet a physical accident.

Frau von Sigmundskron glanced at him once or twice and noticed his expression, and his resolution to look straight before him. Had she possessed Rex's penetration, she would have guessed what was passing in his mind. As it was, she vaguely suspected that he had not altogether given up his plan, and the thought made her uneasy. She could see the clearly cut outline of his handsome face without turning her head. He had put on a fur coat, and she thought that fur was

singularly becoming to fair men who had good complexions—a frivolous observation, apparently, but in reality not so worthless as it appeared. She was thinking of the impression Greif would make upon Hilda, and wondering whether the girl would find him greatly changed or not. She was woman enough to suppose that much would depend upon the first moments of the meeting which was about to take place, and upon the look Greif should first see in Hilda's eyes. If he found her sad, pale, ready to pity him, his nature would be hardened, partly because he hated to be pitied by any one, partly because that same irritation would help him to execute his purpose. But if, on the contrary, Hilda met him with an ill-concealed joy, if there were light in her bright eyes and colour in her cheeks, if her voice spoke sympathy in his sorrows while her face told him of her gladness in the meeting, then things might turn out very differently. After all, thought Frau von Sigmundskron, Greif was only a man, and could not be expected

to act altogether wisely unless a woman helped him.

She had certainly not always held such beliefs, but in latter years they had grown upon her. Sigmundskron was a women's establishment and naturally independent. The baroness had grown to think that, after all, women, when thrown entirely upon their own resources, can manage better than men. She was sure that no three men could have lived so decently and fairly well upon as little as sufficed for herself, Hilda and Berbel. It is true that the distance from such daily forethought and hourly prudence as she needed in her life, to such wisdom as Rex, for instance, possessed so abundantly, was considerable; but the baroness looked upon that as an insignificant argument, if indeed it presented itself to her mind at all. She thought little of Greif's determination to persist, if only Hilda could seem more glad to see him, than sympathising in his misfortunes. With a woman's wholesale faith in woman, she believed utterly in the power

of one of Hilda's glances to keep Greif at Sigmundskron for ever. Especially good women believe in all other women, more than those who are neither notably good nor notably bad. A man's faith in his fellows bears little or no relation to his own moral character, the best men being often the most distrustful, and not always the most agreeable companions. But the better a woman is, the more she believes all other women to be both good and wise, a phenomenon not hitherto explained, though very frequently observed. The baroness held views of this sort concerning Hilda and old Berbel. It was characteristic of her that, as soon as her generosity had got the better of her hesitation in regard to the marriage, she began to consider Greif in the light of a well-beloved adversary, whom the feminine powers of Sigmundskron must vanquish for his own good. It was characteristic, too, that in all her uncertainty she had never considered for a moment the great worldly advantages to be gained or lost.

'We might have sent word that we were coming,' she said, when they had driven more than a mile without speaking. 'Hilda would have come to meet us on the road.'

'It is better so,' answered Greif mournfully.

'I do not see why—it would have given the child such pleasure,' remarked his companion, glancing at his face to see whether his expression would change or not.

'Would it, do you think?' asked Greif in an indifferent tone, though a very slight colour rose in his pale face.

'Indeed it would. It is wrong in you to doubt it. Poor Hilda! She has not too many pleasures of any sort, and meeting you is one of the greatest.'

The blush in Greif's cheek deepened. Again he set his feet firmly before him and braced himself in his seat as though to resist a shock. He hated himself for betraying his feeling in his face, and wished it were night. The baroness continued to speak in gentle tones, determined to obtain an answer from him, and if possible to make

him engage in argument, for she believed that if he argued he was lost.

'Yes,' she said. 'It is a lonely life she leads up there. I am too old to be a real companion, and there is only old Berbel besides. It is pathetic to see her begin to count the days as soon as you are gone, and to watch her face as it gradually turns less grave when more than half the score is marked away.'

'Does she do that?' asked Greif, conscious that he was growing crimson.

'Always. She used to do it, when she was a mere child, and you were only an overgrown boy. It seems to me that she always loved you, long before—long ago, I mean.'

Greif sighed, and looked away. The half-boyish blush faded slowly from his cheeks and left his face paler than before. The good lady saw the change with regret, and wondered whether the slip of the tongue she had made in her last sentence could have anything to do with it. But she did not despair, though she allowed a

few moments to pass in silence. To her surprise it was Greif who renewed the conversation, and in a manner she had not in the least expected.

'I have always loved Hilda,' he said, avoiding her eyes resolutely. 'Ever since I first remember your bringing her to Greifenstein. We were very small, and it must have been in the spring, for we picked mayflowers and found strawberries in the woods.'

'She was not more than six years old then,' observed Frau von Sigmundskron.

'And I was eleven, I think,' replied Greif, forgetting his effort to be silent in the childish reminiscence. 'Was that the first time you came?'

'I believe so. It was four years after we came to live in Sigmundskron.'

'Why did you not come sooner?' Greif asked. It seemed to him that it would be wise to keep the conversation upon the doings of twelve years ago. Another mile of the road was passed, and he was still unshaken.

'There were many reasons,' answered the baroness. 'We had not always been on the best of terms, perhaps because we had scarcely ever met, and I did not care to seem to be forcing my acquaintance upon my relations, so I stayed away for a while. After all, what really brought us together more than anything else, was the fondness of you two children for each other, which showed itself from the first. They brought you to see Hilda, and then we went to your house again—and so—gradually——'

'I remember that Hilda wore a blue frock the first time she came,' remarked Greif quickly, with an attempt to check the baroness's advance towards present times. The intention was so evident that she could not help smiling a little under her hood, and reflecting with some satisfaction that upon this subject, at least, she was more than a match for him.

'Perhaps she did,' she answered. 'I remember that she once had a blue frock.'

The triviality of what they were saying to each other struck Greif all at once, as

compared with the horror of what they had left behind them at Greifenstein. It was but the third day since that fearful catastrophe had darkened his life, and he was exchanging remarks about the clothes Hilda had worn when she was a child. He thought he must be shamefully heartless, unless he were going mad, which, considering his words, seemed probable to himself. He leaned back again, and stared absently at the moving landscape. It seemed to him that his father's spirit was gliding along, high in the black trees beside the road, like mighty Wodin in the northern forests, watching the son he had left behind and listening to the foolish words that fell from his lips. The baroness attributed the sudden chill of his manner and the gloomy look on his face to another cause.

'That was very long ago,' she said, taking advantage of his silence. 'Since then, Hilda has grown up, and you have become a man, and the love that began when you were children has——'

'I cannot marry her!' exclaimed Greif,

so sharply and suddenly that his companion started and looked anxiously into his face.

'Then you will kill her,' answered Frau von Sigmundskron, after a short and painful pause. She, too, was roused to abandon the harmless attempt at diplomacy which had failed, and to speak out what was in her heart.

She was indignant with Greif, and she forgot altogether that she had at first felt precisely as he did himself in regard to the marriage. As the trees flew past and every effort of the strong horses brought her nearer to her home, she knew Hilda was first, and the instinct to defend her child from pain and sorrow gradually began to dominate her. Mild and gentle as she was, she was ready to attack Greif and to force him to marry her daughter whether he would or not. She grew nervous, for the coming meeting between the two might decide their fate, and every moment lost might be the most important. Greif did not reply at once to what she had said,

but a shiver passed through his limbs and he drew the furs more closely about him.

'You are wrong,' he said at last. 'Hilda will forget me in time and will marry a better man and a happier one. I did not mean to tell you—I may as well—I shall make arrangements to give her half of what I have in the world. She will be an heiress then, and can marry well.'

Frau von Sigmundskron did not understand him. To her, the speech seemed cynical and brutal, an insult to Hilda's love, a slight upon her own poverty. The gentle lady's pale and delicate face flushed suddenly with righteous anger and her small hands were clenched tightly beneath the furs. There was a bright light in her soft blue eyes as she answered him.

'Hilda will neither accept your fortune, nor forget you—though it would be better, perhaps, if you could pass out of her memory.'

Greif could not see her face which was hidden by the hood she wore, without leaning forward, but her words and her tone

surprised him. He had been very far from supposing that he should offend her by making such a proposal or by hinting that Hilda might marry happily at some future time. The emotion he had felt had probably made his voice sound harshly, and after all, he had perhaps shown little delicacy in speaking of the money, but he was quite unprepared for his companion's freezing answer. With Greif, however, it was impossible that any misunderstanding should last long, for he was too honest and frank to submit to being misunderstood himself.

'I do not know what you thought that I meant,' he said, turning towards her. 'But you would not be angry if I had explained myself better.'

Frau von Sigmundskron gave him no assistance, but sat quite still in her seat. In her view he had spoken lightly of her child's love and had proposed to set matters right by giving her some of his money. She was angry, and she believed that she had a right to be.

'I love Hilda,' continued Greif, and his

voice trembled a little. If there were a phrase which he had not meant to pronounce, or to think of during the day, it was that. He found himself in a position which obliged him to affirm the strength of his love, and the mere sound of the words disturbed him so that he stopped short, to collect his thoughts.

'You do not act as though you loved her,' said Frau von Sigmundskron coldly. Two days earlier it had seemed to her that in renouncing Hilda he was giving proof of a heroic devotion, and yet she was not really an inconsistent woman.

'I mean to,' answered Greif rather hotly. 'If I refuse to marry her, it is because I love her too much to do her such an irreparable injury. I do not see how I could love her more. As for the rest, it has nothing to do with my love or hers. You are the only heir to Greifenstein after me, and when I die it will in any case be all yours, or Hilda's. I can do nothing with so much, and you may as well have the benefit of what will be yours some day—perhaps

very soon. Is that unreasonable? Does that offend you? If it does, let us say no more about it, and forgive me for having said as much.'

'It would be better not to speak of the fortune,' said the baroness, beginning to relent.

'And you understand me—about Hilda?'

'I cannot say that I do,' replied Frau von Sigmundskron with all the obstinacy of a good woman thoroughly roused in what she believes to be a good cause. 'You love her, and yet you are willing to make her miserably unhappy. The two facts do not agree.'

Greif suppressed a groan and looked at the trees before he answered. If she would only have left him alone, it would have been so much easier to do what he knew was right.

'It is perhaps better that she should be unhappy for a time, now, while she is young, than regret her name when she has taken mine.' His own words had a sententious sound in his ear and he felt that they were

utterly inadequate, but he was fighting against heavy odds and did not know what to say.

'I tell you that the child would die of a broken heart!' exclaimed the baroness with the greatest conviction. 'You say you love her, but you do not know her as I do. I suppose you will allow that it would be better that she should have moments of regret in a lifetime of happiness, than that she should die.'

She was certainly using strong language, but the time was passing rapidly and in the distance she could distinguish already the grey towers of Sigmundskron crowning the beetling crag. She was to be pardoned if she seemed to exaggerate Hilda's danger, but she believed every word she spoke, and she was growing more and more nervous at every turn of the road.

'If I believed that, if I even thought that were better for Hilda's happiness——'

Greif left the sentence unfinished, for he felt that he was on the edge of the precipice, though he was still inwardly convinced that

he was right and that she was wrong. The baroness thought the day was almost won. All her anger melted away in the prospect of success and she talked much and earnestly, dilating upon the situation and using every argument of persuasion which she could devise. But Greif said little, and though he was careful not to offend her afresh, he did not again come so near to committing himself, as he had done once.

'And for that matter,' said the baroness, as the carriage swung round the curve and began the last ascent that ended at the castle gate, 'for that matter, you can call yourself Sigmundskron instead of Greifenstein.'

Greif moved uneasily in his furs. It seemed as though everything were conspiring against him.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Hilda's quick eyes had discerned the carriage when it was still far down upon the road, a mere moving speck in the distance. She had thought it probable that her mother would return on that day, and she knew that she would be driven over from Greifenstein. Moreover, it was very likely that Greif would accompany her, and from the moment when she first saw the vehicle, she watched it and followed it along the winding road until she could clearly see that a man was seated beside her mother. Then the look of anxiety disappeared all at once from her fair face, and was followed by an expression of satisfied happiness which would have been good to see if any one had been there to watch her.

She was standing upon a high part of the half-ruined building, on the northern side, and a person looking up from the road below could have seen her tall figure in strong relief against the pale winter sky. She had dressed herself all in black, but a wide mantle of coarse grey woollen stuff, gathered into a hood at the top and drawn tightly round her against the biting wind, concealed all her figure, leaving only her face visible. Rough and poor as the material was, it became her well, better perhaps than the richest furs could have done. Its folds fell gracefully to her feet as she held the cloak closely about her, and the unbroken neutral tint showed her height more plainly, and set off the marvellous beauty of her skin with a better contrast than any brighter colour.

Sigmundskron had been very desolate and lonely during the last two days, since Hilda's mother had ridden away through the bitter night to do her duty in the house of death. Of course both Hilda and the faithful Berbel had their occupations as usual, and talked over them when they were

together, but the time had passed slowly and heavily. Hilda could form no clear conception of what had taken place, from the confused account of the groom who had brought the news. The idea that her uncle Greifenstein and her aunt Clara were both dead, as well as another unknown gentleman who had been with them, was very dreadful; but Hilda knew so little of death, that the story seemed melancholy and weird to her imagination rather than ghastly and vivid with realised horror. By no effort of her mind could she fancy how the three looked, for she had never seen any one dead in her whole life. She had read of violent deeds in history, but they seemed more like ugly fairy stories than realities, and the tragedy of Greifenstein struck her in a very similar light. It was as though some strange evil genius had passed through the forest, scarce twenty miles from her home, destroying all that he found in his way. They were gone, suddenly, like the light of a candle extinguished, and she should never see them again. They had crossed the

boundary into the wonderful land beyond, and perhaps from where they were now they could see her dreaming about them, and asking herself what that great change meant which only takes place once for each man and each woman in the world. Perhaps—Hilda trembled at the heresy, but let her thoughts run on nevertheless, because after all it was only her imagination that was talking—perhaps that was the end, and there was nothing beyond it. It would be infinitely horrible to be put out of existence altogether, without hope of any life at all afterwards. That might be what was meant by hell, and outer darkness, but upon this point Hilda was not decided. She made up her mind, however, after a little more reflexion, that the Greifensteins could not possibly have been bad enough to deserve to be put out entirely, though she frankly owned to herself that she had never liked her aunt Clara. She was sorry for her now, at all events, and she wished that she had at least made an effort to be more fond of her.

Hilda tried to decide what she should say to Greif when she met him. She never doubted that he would come to Sigmundskron, and in her ignorance of formalities she almost dared to hope that he would stay with her mother for a time. He would certainly not care to remain in Greifenstein for the present. If indeed he should wish to spend a few days with his relations, Hilda foresaw many and great difficulties, but she was surprised that such important household questions as those of bed and board for a possible guest should seem so insignificant when that guest was to be Greif himself.

The real trouble lay in deciding what she should say. It was clear that she could not help looking pleased when he arrived, though it would be her duty to look somewhat sad and sorrowful. Of course she felt for him and he knew it, but he would perhaps expect her to show it very clearly in the first minute and would be hurt if she even smiled. It was not easy not to smile when she saw Greif after a long separation. Perhaps the best way to look very mournful

would be to think that he could not marry her for a long time, now, on account of the mourning. But then, Greif had finished his studies and would henceforth be always at home, which in Hilda's opinion would be almost the same thing as being married, provided she could see him all the time.

Then she thought of that strange warning she had given him when they last parted. She had not understood why she spoke, and yet she had not been able to keep silence. Surely this could not be what was meant. Besides, it was superstitious to believe in such things, and she had been thoughtless in yielding to the impulse. Greif was safe, at all events, and she supposed that everybody's parents must die some day, though not necessarily in such a strange way. Her own father had been killed, too, before she could know him—if she had known him, she would have loved him, as Greif had loved the old gentleman who was now dead.

Hilda became aware that her reflexions were growing more and more heartless and that they did not help her at all, especially

as she could not communicate them to Berbel. She resolved not to reflect any more for the present, and applied herself diligently to her household occupations until the morning on which she expected her mother to return. And now she was not to be alone any longer, for the carriage was advancing up the hill and she could plainly see Greif sitting beside the baroness in the big carriage. She knew his fur cap, for it was the same he had worn last year. She gazed a few moments longer at the pair, regretting that she must be thought heartless if she waved her handkerchief as a signal of welcome, and then she swiftly descended the broken steps that led down into the house, closing as well as she could the crazy door of the turret, to keep out at least a little of the strong north wind.

'Berbel! Berbel! Mamma is coming with Herr Greif!' she cried, before she was really within hearing of the room where Berbel was at work.

Her clear voice rang through the stone passages before her as she ran on, repeating

the news until Berbel answered her at last.

'Is there anything for dinner?' asked Hilda breathlessly, as she stood in the doorway.

The grey-haired woman looked up from her sewing, over her horn-rimmed glasses. She had a hard, good face, with rough brows, sharp eyes and a large mole upon her chin. She was spotlessly clean, and everything about her was supernaturally neat. She was broad-shouldered, rather bony than otherwise, and she moved as though nothing were any trouble which merely required exertion.

'There are potatoes,' she answered laconically, but a strangely genial, half comical little smile was twitching at the corners of her solid mouth.

'Nothing else? Oh, Berbel, there must be something else!' Hilda's voice was full of a sudden distress, and her face exhibited considerable dismay.

'I shall find something,' replied the other. 'Better see first whether they

are hungry. Poor Herr Greif will not eat much——'

'No—but only potatoes, Berbel!'

'Potato dumplings are good things,' observed the woman. 'And fried potatoes with a stewed hare are better,' she added after a pause.

'Is there a hare, then? Oh, Berbel, you dear old thing, how could you frighten me in that way! Where did you get it? We have not had one for ever so long!'

'Wastei,' answered Berbel. Being interpreted, the name signifies Sebastian.

'And Wastei must have got it by poaching——' Hilda's face fell.

'No—the forester has given him a licence this year, and I mended his breeches. There you have the whole history.'

Hilda's spirits revived immediately and she broke into a merry laugh, just as the sound of the horses' bells was heard jingling in the castle-yard below the window. She ran down the stairs to meet her mother and Greif. The story of the hare and Wastei's breeches had almost chased away her good

intentions to look appropriately sad. The hideous tragedy of the Greifensteins was very far from her simple young life.

The great carriage swung round and drew up before the door of the hall, and Hilda was already standing upon the low steps. She had thrown back her hood when she had descended from the battlements, and had not replaced it. Her glorious hair looked like bright gold against the darkness of the hall behind her, and as the cloak fell from her on each side, the black of her dress suddenly threw out by contrast the brilliancy of her face. In another moment her mother and she were clasped in each other's arms, while Greif stood beside them on the steps.

He closed his eyes for an instant, just as hers were turning toward him. This was the woman he had come to renounce, this was she whose love he could put away at a moment's notice for the sake of an idea—his heart beat violently and then stood still, so that he turned very pale. Her hand was already in his, and he scarcely dared to look at her.

'Greif—are you ill?' she asked anxiously.

He had not seen her smile. He had escaped that, he thought. But as he looked up he saw what was harder to bear than any look of joy at his coming. She, who never used to change colour, was pale to the lips, and in her eyes was a look of terror for him which betrayed all her love, and devotion and power of suffering for him, in the flash of an instant. She had indeed been terrified, for he had turned ashy white as he closed his eyes, and his figure had swayed a little unsteadily as though he had been about to fall.

'Are you ill, Greif?' she repeated, unconsciously drawing him nearer to her.

'It is nothing. My head turned for a moment,' he said.

Hilda was not satisfied, but she saw that whatever had been the matter, he had recovered himself for the present, at least, and she supposed that he was exhausted with the fatigue and grief which had filled the last days. She became silent and preoccupied, as they all entered the hall together

and ascended the steps to the sunny sitting-room over the court. Then Frau von Sigmundskron left her alone with Greif, on pretence of taking off her mantle and smoothing her hair, but as she went away she gave him a look which signified that she would not disturb them for some time.

There was the great stone chimney-piece, just as Greif had seen it in his vision of the meeting, and Hilda sat down beside it, as he had fancied that she would. But the room was not cold, as he had anticipated, for the fire was clear and big, and the sun streamed brightly in through the southern window. He had imagined the place chill and dreary, for he knew that he should need the impression of dreariness to help him. Instead, it was warm and sunny, and though Hilda was still a little pale, her pallor did not produce the effect he had expected. He tried to begin, for in spite of all, his resolution was still unbroken, but the words stuck in his throat.

'Greif,' said Hilda, looking up suddenly into his face. 'I do not know how to tell

you—I am so sorry, so sorry for you, dear. I have not the words, but it is all in my heart. You understand, do you not?'

She had risen, seeing that he was still standing, and she came to him, and clasped both her hands upon his shoulder and looked up into his eyes. It would have been easier if she had begun in any other way than that. With her touch upon him, her eyes on his, her breath and soft voice so near, he could not play coldness. But he was strong still.

His arms went round her swiftly and pressed her to him, and he kissed her as he had never kissed her before, three times in quick succession. Then he gently led her back to her chair and returned to his own place, standing as he had meant to do, to give himself more courage. She submitted wonderingly, without understanding why he made her sit down, and for a few seconds neither spoke. At last he turned away from her and began to talk, looking at the window to avoid her eyes.

'Hilda, a very terrible thing has happened, and I must explain it to you, in order that

you may comprehend what I must do. Will you promise me to listen patiently and to forgive me beforehand for all I am going to say?'

'Yes,' answered the young girl rather faintly. The strong presentiment of evil had come upon her again, as it had come that day when he was leaving Greifenstein. She bent her head and covered her eyes with her hand, as though not to see the blow that was to descend, though she must feel its weight. It was all instinctive, for not the faintest thought of what he was going to say could ever have suggested itself to her mind.

'Yes,' said Greif, 'it is very terrible. But I have come here to say it and I must say it all. You know what has happened. My poor mother is dead, and those who murdered her, have killed themselves—my father and his half-brother. You did not know that I had an uncle?'

Hilda shook her head, looking up for a moment.

'He was a bad man, too,' continued Greif.

'He had been an officer and had betrayed his trust in the times of revolution, was sentenced and imprisoned; he escaped from the fortress, made his way to South America, and lived there for forty years in exile, until the amnesty was proclaimed. He was not Greifenstein, he was Rieseneck, half-brother to my father by the mother's side and younger than he. That was bad enough, however. It was the reason why my father lived here in the forest so quietly. He was afraid that people would remember he was Rieseneck's brother. You see, the affair made a great noise at the time. Your mother knows all about it. Well, it was hard enough, as I say, to have such a disgrace in the family. We did not know that Rieseneck had a son —I found that my best friend—his name is Rex—is he.'

'How strange!' exclaimed Hilda. 'Why is his name Rex?'

'It is not, exactly. He and his father called themselves so in order not to be identified. It was almost necessary for them—as it may be for me now.'

'For you?' asked Hilda in the utmost astonishment. 'You would change your name—why?'

Greif stared at her. She seemed not to understand at all, and yet he had gone into Rieseneck's story merely to make his own seem more terrible by comparison.

'You must know that, in the world, such calamities as have befallen me leave a mark, a stain even upon the innocent,' said Greif. 'The world looks askance at the sons of murderers.'

'And are you afraid of the world, Greif?' asked Hilda. 'That is not like you. For the Rieseneeks, well, I understand—he was disgraced, condemned, imprisoned. But you! It is like a dreadful story of the dark ages, but there is no shame in it, nothing to be ashamed of. It is terrible, awful, appalling, but you can hold your head as high as any one. Do you suppose it is the first tragedy that ever occurred in your family or in mine? Did not old Sigmund strangle his own brother with his hands, here in this house seven hundred

years ago, and am I ashamed to call him my forefather?'

'That is very different from what has happened to me,' answered Greif. 'You cannot understand, but the world judges according to its light. If I, the son of a man who murdered his wife and killed himself, were to present myself to any man of my own rank and ask him for his daughter in marriage I should receive a refusal, and perhaps an indignant one. I am not considered a fit person to marry an innocent girl of my class, I am stamped with a stained name, branded with the sign of others' crimes, ruined before my life is begun, cut off from happiness, from ambition, from you—O Hilda! that is what I came to tell you—I have spoken very badly—it is best to say it clearly. My beloved, this has taken you from me, and me from you, and has cast me adrift from all that remained, from the greatest and best of all. If I could dare to marry you now, to give you my miserable name, to take you to the home that is darkened by so many deaths

—I should be the last and lowest of men! It is of no use, for I feel it—the only honourable thing left for me to do, in so much dishonour, is to leave you for ever and at once. If I were willing still to make you my wife you ought to despise me, and trample the memory of my love under foot as a vile thing. O Hilda, Hilda! it is death to me, but it is best for you.'

The blow had fallen, and Hilda sat quite still in her place, covering her eyes with one hand, as she had done at first. All through his long preamble, she had felt that there was something dreadful to come, and now it had come indeed, in the shape she least expected, in the shape which of all others she would most have feared. She did not move, but the soft, fresh colour faded from her face, till it was whiter than the white hand she held before it. Greif looked at her, and his head swam. He thought neither of her suffering nor of his own, as the words came fast and incoherent from his pale lips. He went on, insisting, repeating, lamenting with the vehemence of

a passionate man who has overcome all that is gentlest in himself and takes a savage delight in rending his own wounds.

'It is done, and you know, now,' he cried bitterly. 'I have fought against myself, against every one, to do this thing—do you think it is easy to give up such a love as you have been to me? And yet, I would not take you, no, not if you pursued me across the world—what right have I to you? The right of loving better than anything God has made was ever loved before? It is gone, that right, gone with my name, gone with all I once was, buried with my father and my mother in the old place beyond Greifenstein. Right? I have no rights any longer—neither to love, nor to hate, nor to be happy in the thought of love, nor of Hilda. And yet, in all the years to come, you will be with me. I cannot give up the right to remember you, and to think of your dear eyes. Ah, if it were but my own fault, how easy it would be to bear! I wish I had wronged you—you would thrust me from you—it would help

me—at least, if I had done you harm, I could die for it, and that would be so easy and simple, and would end all so well. I wish I had done some hideous, nameless deed with my own hands, that I might be driven out by men, and forced to leave you by others stronger than I! Anything, anything, anything but this!'

He bent his head against the cold stones of the high chimney-piece, and beat his brow against the hewn carvings of it, closing his eyelids over his dry and smarting eyes, wishing that every moment might be the last of his wretched existence, and at the same time miserably conscious that his strength would outlast all his sufferings. He had meant to be so calm and gentle, he had planned how he would gradually explain all to Hilda and break the shock for her, he had thought that when it was over, he could firmly say one solemn good-bye, and go back to his home alone. He had not known what love could do, nor how he should be tortured and wounded and bruised in the conflict. But yet he was

strong and victorious. His dignity and self-respect had been sorely shaken in the fight, and he had not found the calm and tactful speeches he had planned before; but in spite of every one, and chiefly in spite of his own heart, he had bravely done what he had come to do. The victory was more agonising than any defeat could have been, but it was victory, notwithstanding.

Manlike, in his utmost distress, he had forgotten Hilda's self in the overwhelming thoughts of her that rushed through his confused brain. Her hands had fallen upon her knee and she sat like a statue in the deep old chair, whiter than any marble, her colourless lips parted, her wonderful eyes fixed upon him in a glassy stare. Even her hair seemed to have lost its golden sheen, as though it were suddenly dead or turning into stone. And yet she was not unconscious. A very strong and perfect organisation rarely breaks down under the first shock it receives, no matter how violent. Hilda was not only conscious, she was even able to speak.

'Greif!' She spoke his name clearly, in a low voice.

He started, for he had almost forgotten her presence. He lifted his haggard face and turned towards her, supporting himself with one hand on the chimney-piece.

'Do you mean all you have said?' she asked very slowly, as though each word cost her an effort.

'I mean it all, Hilda,' he answered, his tones still trembling with the violence of the storm that had passed through him.

'You mean that because your father did this deed, you are ashamed to marry me?'

'More than ashamed——'

'And you will go away and leave me for ever, for the sake of this idea alone?'

'Ah, Hilda—you have not understood ——'

'I have understood all, because I love you, and now I know that you love me with all your heart——'

'Oh, thank you, my beloved! God bless you for seeing the truth——'

'Do not thank me——'

She caught her breath, then with a swift movement she was on her feet, standing beside him. The glassy stare was gone from her eyes, and they shone with a blue light like fire. Her strong white hands suddenly laid hold of his wrists and held him firmly.

'Do not thank me, Greif—or thank me, if you will—as you please. I will not let you go.'

There was a power in her tone which struck him with amazement, a concentrated, unrelenting, almost furious energy that startled him. He had expected tears, protestations, laments; he had thought that she might faint away, that the sight of her sufferings would treble his own. But he had not expected the short sharp outburst of a passion as strong as his, or stronger, he had not foreseen or guessed that this simple girl, brought up so far from the world, would take him by the hands and hold him, and tell him that she would not let him go, with an accent of determination that might have staggered the strongest man.

'You will not?' he exclaimed, aghast at the prospect of a battle worse than the first.

'No,' she answered, still grasping his wrists and gazing into his face with her fiery eyes. 'I will not, and I know that I am strong. I feel it.'

During nearly a minute neither spoke, but Hilda's hold did not relax for a second, and her lids did not once veil the intensity of her look. Even if Greif had possessed a wider experience of women than he had, it would not have helped him much. He was utterly at a loss. His manly nature would have provided him with weapons to rid himself of a woman of coarser instincts, even if he had loved her to distraction, provided he had felt that he must part from her. He would have felt that he could dominate a baser affection and force it down to his will, by sheer strength of purpose, no matter at what cost; but he was met here by something he had never understood, and he did not know what to do. The childlike innocence of Hilda's

maiden love gave an extraordinary character to her passion. The absence of anything like the common expressions of love made the transcendent power of what moved her stand out in magnificent grandeur. Never in his life had he dreamt that her quiet and undemonstrative affection was capable of anything but a calm and beautiful development. He had not guessed the existence of such resistless force as blazed from her eyes, he had believed her only capable of receiving, he had not imagined that she was strong enough to take boldly what was refused her. The radiance of a spotless soul, burning in the white-heat of a passion as pure as itself, dazzled and awed him. As he looked, he felt as though he were held in the grasp of a splendid, wrathful angel, who disputed the possession of him, not with himself, but with the opposing powers of evil.

It is amazing that in such a case he should still have found strength and courage to resist this last great trial of his sincerity. Most men would have yielded and would have accepted their fate. But though Greif

was young, and not very wise, he had stern and obstinate blood in his veins, and he was acting under the strongest conviction that had ever possessed him. Knowing her only as he had known her before, the fair and innocent idol of his boyish heart, he had felt that he could never allow her to take his darkened name. In the beginning his intention had been very honourable, in his struggle with himself it had grown high and chivalrous, but in the face of such opposition as he met from her mother and now from herself, it had assumed proportions that bordered upon the grotesque. And yet as he looked now upon her noble face, illuminated and radiant with a beauty almost too pure for him to understand, he felt even more than before that such a creature could never be allowed to ally herself with one whose name was a reproach among men. He did not know how to oppose her, but he knew that she must be opposed, at any cost, for her own sake.

His eyes fell before her gaze, and his hands trembled nervously in her grasp, so

that she began to think that he was yielding, whereas he was in reality making a supreme effort to concentrate his courage and to keep the mastery of himself. While he seemed to be sinking to her will, he was gathering his strength, saying in his heart that if he lost this battle he should never hold up his head again.

The sun streamed broadly through the diamond panes of the casement upon the patched and faded carpet, creeping slowly along his accustomed path in which the hours were marked, as on a dial, by threadbare seams and the leaves and flowers of a half-obliterated design. In the huge chimney the logs burned steadily with a low, roaring sound, and the shabby furniture of the place seemed to doze lazily in the warmth, as old men do whose strength is far spent. And in the midst of the commonplace scene a drama was being enacted, less horrible in outward appearance than the tragedy of Greifenstein, but scarcely less fearful to the two young hearts that beat so fiercely and full of life.

The sunlight moved but a very little, as far as would show the passing of a minute, perhaps, and then Greif looked up once more and again met the gaze of Hilda's eyes.

## CHAPTER XIX

'HILDA, I will die for you, but I cannot marry you.' Greif spoke quietly, but with the utmost decision.

'I have said that I will not let you go,' she answered, 'and I will not. You are my life, and I will not die—I should if you left me.'

'You will forget me,' he said.

'Forget you!' Her voice rang through the room. She dropped his hands with a passionate gesture and turned away from him, making one or two steps towards the window. Then she came back and stood before him.

'Forget you!' she exclaimed again. 'You do not know what you are saying. You do not know me, if you can say it. Do you

think, because I am a girl, that I am weak? I tell you I am stronger than you, and I tell you that you are mad. Do you think that if I would have shed the last drop of my blood to save you from pain yesterday, I love you less to-day? I love you a thousand times more for what you would do, but you shall not do it. I love you as no woman can love, who has not lived long life. And you say that you can go away, and that I shall forget you! As I am a Christian woman, if I forget you, may God forget me, now and in the hour of death! I could not if I would. And you say that you will leave me—for what? Because your father has done a terrible deed, and has taken his own life. For a name—for a nothing else! What is a name to me, compared with you yourself? I love you so, that if you had yourself done the most monstrous crime, I would not leave you, not if we were to die a shameful death together. And you would leave me, for my own good! For my advantage—oh, I would not have heaven itself without you.

Forget! What would there be left to remember, if you were taken? The emptiness of the place where you were, the wide emptiness that all heaven could never fill! Your name—do you love it better than me? But I know that you love me, though you are mad. Then put your name away, cast it from you to whomsoever will have it. Do you think that Hilda von Sigmundskron cares for names, or wants new ones? Am I a peasant's child, to sigh for a coronet and to give you up because you have put it off? Be what you will, you are only Greif to me, and Greif, only, means more to me than heaven or earth and all that are in them. You shake your head—what would you say? That it is not true? My love needs no oaths to bind it, nor to prove it. You can see it in my face, for I know that it is there. Yes—you cannot meet my eyes—honest as you are, and good, and noble, and true-hearted as any man that ever drew breath. Do you know why? You dare not—you who dare anything else. I love you the more for having dared this—but

you shall not do it. I will not let you go, I will not, never, never!'

Greif had turned his head away and stood leaning against the chimney almost in the same attitude he had taken from the first. She had spoken quickly and passionately and he had not been able to answer anything she said, for she did not pause, replying herself to the questions she asked and giving him no time to oppose her.

'I was wrong,' he said, half bitterly, half tenderly. 'You will not forget me any more than I can forget you. It will make it harder to say good-bye.'

'It shall never be said, until one of us two is dying, Greif.'

'We cannot change our fate, though we love ever so dearly,' he answered. 'Think, Hilda, if you took me as I am, what you might suffer in after years, what our children would surely suffer when they went out into the world, and the world began to whisper that they were the grandsons of that Greifenstein——'

'What is the world to us, dear? And as

for our sons, if God sends us any, I know that if they grow up to be brave gentlemen, loyal and true, the world will leave them in peace.'

'The world is a hard place——'

'Then why have anything to do with it? I have been happy, here in the forest, for so many years—could you not be happy here with me?'

'I should still be my father's son—I should still be Greifenstein.'

'Would I have you anything else?'

'Hilda, it is impossible!' cried Greif with suddenly renewed energy. 'I have said all. Must I say it again?'

'If you were to say it a thousand times, it would not make it more true. But I will listen to all you tell me, if you like.'

With a calmness that showed how certain she felt of her victory, Hilda resumed her seat at the opposite side of the fireplace, folded her hands together, and leaning her head against the back of the easy-chair, watched him with half-closed eyes. She was not tired, and would very probably be

able to sustain the contest longer than he. After the first shock of the announcement was over, under which she had suffered more in one moment than would have sufficed to fill a week with agonising pain, the strong impulse to hold him had come upon her and her elastic strength had been roused to its fullest energy. But the memory of that one moment of agony was enough to make her guess what she would feel if he left her.

Arguments repeated a second time rarely seem so forcible as when they are first heard. Painfully and conscientiously Greif recapitulated his reasons, trying to speak coldly and concisely, exerting himself to the utmost and summoning all the skill he could command in order to state his case convincingly. Hilda could not have put the idea that possessed him to a more cruel test than this. It began to dawn even upon himself that he was in pursuit ot a chimera, and the necessity for the enormous self-sacrifice, upon which he insisted, was breaking down in the face of such a determined opposition on the

part of those who were more interested than himself. Doggedly and persistently he continued, nevertheless, fighting his love as though it had been a devil, thrusting Hilda's from his thoughts as though it had been an evil temptation, savagely determined not to part with his belief in what he took for his duty. It was a strange sight, and would have afforded material for reflexion to an older and wiser person than Hilda.

'That is all I have to say,' he concluded. 'It seems to me that I cannot say it more clearly. You know what it costs me to repeat it all.'

An expression of intense pain passed over his face, and he turned away in order to hide it from Hilda. He was hardly able to make his strained lips pronounce the last words.

'I am not convinced,' said Hilda after a moment's pause. 'No eloquence in the world would convince me that you and I should sacrifice our lives for an idea, merely to save ourselves from the possibility of a few ill-natured remarks hereafter. That is

all it comes to in the end. I will tell you the history of this idea.'

She seemed calmer than ever, but the light had not faded from her eyes, and Greif felt that she was ready to spring upon him in an instant, to grasp his hands in hers and to say again that she would not let him go. He glanced nervously towards her, and the look of suffering returned to his face.

'The history is this,' she said. 'When the dreadful thing happened, you thought of me. Then it seemed to you that you should free me from our engagement. That seemed hard to you, because you love me so much—it was so hard that it took all your strength to make the resolution. You have spoken to my mother and to me. Now, I ask you whether my mother, at least, is not old enough to judge what is right? Did she agree with you, and tell you that you should give me up?'

'No—she did all she could to persuade me——'

'Of course,' interrupted Hilda. 'Of course she did. Now shall I tell you why

you will not allow yourself to be persuaded, and why you insist on ruining your life as well as mine?'

She rose again, gently this time, and came and stood beside him. He turned his head away as though it hurt him, and as she spoke she could see only his short, bright curling hair.

'You will not be persuaded, because it was so hard for you to make the resolution at first, that you believe it must be right in spite of every other right, and you would sacrifice yourself and me for an idea which is strong only because it hurt you to accept it at first. Everything you have done and said is brave, noble, generous — but you have gone too far—you have lost sight of the true truth in pursuing a truth that was true yesterday. It never was your duty to do more than offer to set me free. And as for the name, Greif dear—I have heard that such things are done—would you, if it pleases you—that is, if it would help you to forget—would you take mine, darling, instead of letting me take yours? Perhaps

it would make it easier—you are only Greif to me, but perhaps if you could be Greif Sigmundskron to yourself, and live here, and never go to Greifenstein nor think of it again—perhaps, my beloved, I could help you to forget it all, to the very name that pains you so.'

She laid her hand upon his shoulder and pressed her cheek softly against his curls as she spoke the last words, though she could not see his face. The accents were so low and tender that her voice sounded like soft music breathed into his ear.

'No—no! I must never do it!' he tried to say, but the words were very indistinct.

Hilda felt him move nervously, and she saw that he was grasping the chimney-piece with both hands as though to support himself by it. In another moment his broad shoulders seemed to heave and then shrink together. He staggered and almost fell to the ground, though Hilda did her best to hold him. With a great effort he gained the chair in which she had sat and fell back in it. His eyes were closed and the lids

were blue, while his tightly compressed lips moved as though he were biting them.

Hilda knelt beside him and took his cold hands. The colour was all gone from her face, for she was terribly frightened.

'Greif, Greif!' she cried in anguish. 'What is it, my beloved? Speak, darling —do not look like that!'

'I am in great pain,' he answered, not opening his eyes, but faintly trying to press her fingers.

She saw that he was ill, and that his suffering had nothing to do with his previous emotion. She opened the door quickly and called for help. Her mother's room was very near and Frau von Sigmundskron appeared immediately.

'Greif is ill—dying perhaps!' exclaimed Hilda, dragging her into the little sitting-room to the young man's side.

The baroness leaned over him anxiously, and at the touch of a strange hand his purple lids opened slowly and he looked up into her face.

'It is in my head—in the back,' he succeeded in saying.

Greif had fallen in harness, fighting his battle with the morbid energy of a man already ill. To the very end he had held his position, resisting even that last tender appeal Hilda had made to him, but the strain upon his nerves had been too great. He was strong, indeed, but he was young and not yet toughened into that strange material of which men of the world are made. The loss of sleep, the deadly impression made upon him by the death of his father and mother, the terrible struggle he had sustained with himself, all had combined together to bring about the crisis. At first it was but a shooting pain in the head, so sharp as to make his features contract. Then it came again and again, till it left him no breathing space, and he sank down overcome by physical torture, but firm in his intention as he had been in the beginning. It was all over, and he would not argue his case again for many a long day.

'Take me home—I am very ill,' he gasped, as the baroness tried to feel his pulse.

But she shook her head, for it seemed to her that it was too late.

'You must stay here until you are better,' she answered softly. 'The jolting of the carriage would hurt you.'

He closed his eyes again, unable to speak, far less to discuss the matter. The mother and daughter whispered together and then both left the room, casting a last anxious glance at Greif as he lay almost unconscious with pain.

Great was the consternation of Berbel when she heard that the young lord of Greifenstein had suddenly fallen ill in the house, but she was not a woman to waste words when time pressed. There was but one thing to be done. Greif must have Hilda's room and Hilda must take up her quarters with her mother. His carriage must fetch the physician from the nearest town, and bring such things as might be necessary. To Berbel's mind everything seemed already organised, and before any

one had time to make a remark she had set about arranging matters to her own satisfaction. There was only one difficulty in the way, and that was Greif himself, who, in spite of his acute suffering had not the slightest intention of submitting to an illness at Sigmundskron.

In the first moment the pain had altogether overcome him, but he gradually became so much accustomed to it as to be able to think more connectedly. The idea of remaining where he was seemed intolerable. To be taken care of by Frau von Sigmundskron, to be under the same roof with Hilda, would be to give up the contest for which he had sacrificed so much. He did not understand that his mind would act very differently when he had recovered, and that much which seemed disagreeable at present, might be attractive then.

He rose to his feet without assistance, and he saw that he was alone. Hilda had gone in one direction and her mother in another in search of something to alleviate his suffering. To get out of the house was

the work of a moment. In the court there was the groom who had driven him, still rubbing down his horses and setting things to rights before going inside to warm himself. The man was the same who had brought Greif the news at Schwarzburg, a devoted fellow, born and bred on the estate, unlike the house servants who had been changed so often.

'Karl,' said Greif, going up to him, 'you must harness and drive me back to Greifenstein at once. I am sorry for you, but I am too ill to stay here. I will walk down the road—come after me as soon as you can.'

There was nothing to be done but to obey the simple order. Karl looked surprised but lost no time, especially as Greif was already going out of the gate. In a trice the collars were on the horses again, the traces hitched, the reins unwound, and Karl was seated upon the box. He was glad for himself, though he thought it a very long pull for the horses. The road went downhill over most of the way, however, and Karl reflected that when his

master was once in the carriage behind him, he could drive as slowly as he pleased. Just as he was ready, Frau von Sigmundskron and Hilda appeared upon the threshold of the hall, both looking pale and anxious. They had found Greif gone from the sitting-room and had at first imagined that he had lost his way in the house; but Hilda's quick ears caught the sounds that came from the court and she knew that the groom was putting the horses in.

'What is that?' asked Hilda, addressing the groom. 'Why have you harnessed again?'

'The merciful lord has ordered it,' returned Karl, lifting his military cap with one hand while he held the reins with the other. 'The merciful lord has walked down the road, and I am to overtake him.'

Therewith Karl turned his pair neatly and the horses trotted slowly towards the gate.

'Stop, stop!' cried Hilda, running down the steps and following him, while her mother came after her more slowly.

Karl drew up and looked back.

'Herr von Greifenstein is very ill,' the girl said. 'He will never be able to drive alone so far—indeed he ought to stay here and you should go for the doctor.'

She was so much confused that she hardly knew what to say, when her mother joined her, calmer and more sensible.

'You say that he went out of the gate. How long ago?' inquired the elder lady.

'It may be five minutes.'

'Did he say anything besides ordering the carriage?'

'He said he was ill and must go home at once, and that he was sorry for me.'

Frau von Sigmundskron hesitated. It was clear that Greif had not been so ill as she had at first supposed, or he could not have walked out alone, ordered the carriage and gone on without support. Karl interrupted her meditations.

'Merciful ladyships forgive me,' he observed, 'but if he walks farther he will be more ill.' He gathered the reins and prepared to move on.

'Go, Karl,' said the baroness, and in a moment he was gone.

'Mother—you ought to have gone too ——' Hilda began, looking into her face with an expression of mingled anxiety and disappointment.

'I do not see how I could, my child,' answered the baroness. 'If Greif was strong enough to go it was best that he should do so. It would be hard for us to take care of him. He has his cousin at Greifenstein, and they can send for me if he is worse. Besides——' She hesitated and stopped.

'What?' asked Hilda anxiously.

'He showed good sense, since he was able to go. It is not the custom in the world for young men to make long visits in such cases.'

'The world, the world!' exclaimed Hilda wearily. 'I have heard so much of the world this morning. Mother—— He will not send for you. We shall not know how he is——'

'I will take care that we may know,'

answered the baroness quietly. 'He is young and very strong. Perhaps it is only fatigue after all, and we shall hear that he is well to-morrow.'

Hilda's instinct told her to slip from her mother's side, to pass the gate and run down by the short and steep descent to the foot of the hill. The road made a wide sweep before passing this point and she would have been certain to reach it long before the carriage. But she knew that such wildness could produce no good result. She would stand there waiting for the carriage, it would come, Greif would tell Karl to stop, and then—what could happen? There would be a sort of momentary renewal of the scene which had ended a quarter of an hour ago, with the unpleasant addition of the driver as a witness. She could not get in and drive with him, and so the situation would have to end abruptly, perhaps in another attack of that pain which had so suddenly prostrated Greif. It was very hard that he should have escaped in this way, and nothing but his suffering could

excuse his conduct; but to have him return now would be almost worse. After all, Hilda was woman enough to know that she had got the best of the argument at the last, and that Greif's abrupt departure looked very much like a precipitate flight. She knew also that he loved her, and that it would be impossible for him to leave the country without seeing her again. No woman would believe the man she loves capable of that. It was therefore madness to think of intercepting him upon the road, in order to exchange another word. With hands loosely joined together and hanging down, Hilda stood gazing at the vacant gateway. The happiness she had anticipated an hour earlier, when she had descried the distant carriage that brought Greif to her, had been strangely interrupted, and yet she was not altogether unhappy now, though she was very sad and silent. For all the world she would not have unlived that hour, nor unsaid the words that had passed her lips. The time had been very short, and yet it had sufficed to show her what Greif's love

for her really was, and what he was willing to suffer for her sake. She had, too, the satisfaction of feeling that this suffering had not been brought upon him by herself, and that she had used all her strength to relieve him of it. He had indeed refused to give up the burden to the very end, but Hilda did not believe that he would bear it many days longer after what she had said. Her youth and strength refused to accept such an evil destiny, and her keen feminine perception told her that more than half of his obstinacy had been morbid and unnatural, and would disappear with the change wrought in him by rest and quiet. Her anxiety now was for him, and did not concern herself any longer. She knew nothing of illness save as a sort of vague misfortune, a state of undefined pain during which people stayed in bed and were visited by physicians. Never during her lifetime had any one of the three women who composed the little household been ailing even for a day, and though Hilda had sometimes been told, when she was visiting at Greifenstein, that

Clara was not well enough to appear, she had only fancied how the poor lady would look when she was not painted and her hair was all out of curl. That did not help her to realise what an illness meant. She could only recall the look on Greif's face when he had reeled to the chair and then thrown his head back, while his closed lids turned purple. For a long time that was the only picture evoked in her mind when sickness was spoken of.

Frau von Sigmundskron looked at her daughter, without understanding her thoughts. She guessed what the nature of the interview had probably been, but she had no means of knowing how it had ended. Nevertheless she was willing to wait until Hilda chose to speak, and she knew that she would not wait long. Presently she passed her arm through her daughter's and led her gently back towards the house. The latter made no resistance, but walked quietly beside her across the sunny court. When they reached the door of the hall Hilda turned and looked again towards the gate.

'I wonder how it will be when he comes in by that way again!' she said.

Then she went in with her mother and entered the sitting-room, and sat down in her old place, in the chair into which Greif had fallen. She was left alone for a few minutes, while Frau von Sigmundskron went to tell Berbel that Greif was gone after all, and that there was no need to upset all the household arrangements.

The fire was still burning brightly, though one of the logs had fallen into two pieces, making a great cave of coals and flames in the midst. The slow sun had not crept as far as the next threadbare seam upon the faded carpet. The room was the same as it had been a quarter of an hour earlier. Hilda thought of all that had happened while that log was being burned through, and while the bright sunlight had moved across that narrow space. She spread her white hands to the blaze, and looked at the red glare between her fingers.

She was not altogether as calm as she looked, but she was certainly far less moved

than might have been expected. There was a solidity about her nerves that would have driven to despair the morbid worshippers of the decadent school of romance, a natural force which made it very hard to understand her. Womanly she undoubtedly was, but of that type in woman which is rarely seen in cities and not often in the country. There is a hopefulness inherent in perfect physical organisations that have never been strained by unnatural means which makes them seem hard and unfeeling, to weaker natures. They have a way of sitting still without betraying their thoughts, when they are not called upon to act, which produces the impression that they feel nothing, and care for nothing but themselves. It is only in great moments that they are seen at their best, and that their overpowering strength in action excites wonder. They show none of those constant changes that belong to very nervous people, and make them interesting as studies of sensibility. Their faces do not reflect the light and shade of every passing circumstance,

their voices are not full of quickly contrasted intonations which tell more than words themselves, they do not blush and turn pale at every suggestion of happiness or unhappiness to themselves, everyday speeches do not raise in their minds quick trains of association, linked and running on like an ascending scale in music, to culminate in a little moment of emotion, in a little flutter of the heart, half pleasant, half painful. Their strong pulses beat quietly, in an unvarying rhythm, the full and even flow of blood maintains a soft colour in their fresh faces; when they are tired they sleep, when they are awake they are rarely tired; what they could do yesterday, they can do as well to-day, and they feel that they will be able to do the same to-morrow. They never feel those sharp thrusts close to the heart that tell us how quickly one thrust a little sharper than the others would end all. They do not lie awake in the hours of the night counting the blows of the cruel little hammer that beats its prison to pieces at last and is broken in the ruin of the breast

that confined it. And the world counts it all to them for dulness and lack of delicate feeling, with little discernment and less justice, until the day when it sees them roused by such passions as alone can rouse them, or suffering such deadly pain as only the strongest can live to suffer.

The baroness came back in a few minutes and stood beside Hilda, laying her hand upon her daughter's forehead, and bending down.

'What did he say to you, child?' she asked.

'He said that he would not marry me because it would be a shame that I should be called Greifenstein after what has happened.'

'That was what he told me,' replied her mother, leaving her and taking up a piece of needlework that lay on the table. She could not be idle. 'That was what he told me,' she repeated thoughtfully. 'And I answered that he was mistaken.'

'He said you had done your best to persuade him,' said Hilda, and then relapsed into silence.

'Do you know what I did?' she asked presently.

'I suppose you told him that you did not care for such things as names.'

'Yes—I said that. But I took his hands, and I told him that I would not let him go. I think I was very angry at something, but not at him.'

Frau von Sigmundskron laid her work upon her knees and looked at the young girl attentively for some seconds.

'Was I wrong?' Hilda asked, turning round as she felt her mother's gaze upon her.

'No. I do not see that it was wrong, but I think I should have acted differently. I think I would have tried to make him see —well, I never was like you.'

'I am sorry—I would do anything to be like you, mother dear.'

'You need not be sorry, child. You are like some one I loved better than myself—you remind me of your father. And what did Greif say to that?'

'He refused to the very last—then he

had that pain in his head and I thought he was going to die. You know the rest. O mother, what will become of him, and when shall we see him again?'

'I do not know when we shall see him, dear, but I do not think he will be very ill. When a man has the strength to do what he has just done, and go away on foot, as he went, he is not in a dangerous state.'

Frau von Sigmundskron resumed her needlework and did not speak again for a long time. She had found time to think, and Greif's conduct was strange in her eyes.

## CHAPTER XX

Karl overtook Greif before the latter had walked half a mile. The rapid decision, the brisk walk and the biting air had contributed to alleviate the intolerable pain to which he had momentarily succumbed, and as he lay back among the furs he began to fancy that he should not be ill after all, and to regret the scarcely decent haste he had employed in making his escape. But when he tried to think over what had happened he found that his brain was confused and his memories indistinct. Of one thing only he was quite sure, that he had accomplished his intention and had renounced Hilda for ever. With the emotion caused by the thought the pain seized him again and he lay almost unconscious in his seat while

Karl guided the horses carefully along the steep road. Before many miles were passed, Greif was aware of nothing but the indistinct shapes of trees and rocks that slipped in and out through the field of his aching vision. Everything else was a blank, and the least attempt at thought became agonising. At one time he could not remember whether he was going towards his home or away from it; at another, he was convinced that some one was in the carriage with him, either his father or Frau von Sigmundskron, and he tried vaguely to reconcile the fact of their presence with his inability to see their shapes.

At last he knew that he was being lifted from the carriage, and he made an effort to straighten himself and to walk upright. But strong arms were round him and bore him through bright halls where the low sun shot in level rays through stained windows, and along broad dim corridors that seemed as though they would never end, until at last he was laid upon a bed in a warm room. There, all at once, as in a dream, he recog-

nised Rex, who was standing beside him and holding his hand.

'I must be ill, after all,' he said faintly.

'Very,' answered Rex. 'Do you know me? Can you tell me what has happened to you?'

Greif stared at him for a few seconds and then answered with an effort.

'I have done it,' he said, and closed his eyes.

After that, he was conscious of nothing more, neither of daylight nor of darkness, neither of solitude nor of the presence of Rex and of those who helped him in his incessant care. A day passed, and another, one physician came, then two, and then a great authority was summoned and installed himself in the castle, and visited the sick man six times during the day, and feasted royally in the meanwhile, after the manner of great authorities, who have an amazing discernment in regard to the good things of this life, as well as an astonishing capacity for enjoying them.

All manner of things were done to Greif

of which he never knew anything. He had ice upon his head and burning leaves of mustard on his feet, he was fed with strange mixtures of wine and soup, of raw meat and preserves, all of which he swallowed unconsciously without getting any better. Still he tossed and raved, and moaned and laughed, and cried like a child and howled like a madman.

The great authority shook his head and pensively drank the old burgundy that was set before him, partaking of a delicate slice of game between one sip and another, and thoughtfully cropping the heads of the forced asparagus when he was tired of the venison. For a long time he and Rex said little to each other at their meals, and the physician was inclined to suppose that his companion was a man of merely ordinary intelligence. One day, however, as Greif grew no better, Rex determined to startle the good man, by ascertaining what he knew. In order to lead the conversation he threw out a careless remark about an unsettled question which he knew to be agitating the scientific world,

and concerning which it was certain that the great doctor would have a firm opinion of his own. To the astonishment of the latter, Rex disputed the point, at first as though he cared little, but gradually and with matchless skill disclosing to his adversary a completeness of information and a keenness of judgment which fairly took away his breath.

'You almost convince me,' said the physician, who had quite forgotten to help himself a second time to green peas, though they were the first he had seen that year. 'Upon my word, Herr Rex, you almost convince me. And yet you are a very young man.'

'How old do you think I am?' inquired Rex with a faint smile.

The doctor examined his face attentively and then looked long at his hands. He became so much interested that he rose from his seat and came and scrutinised Rex's features as though he were studying the points of an animal.

'I am amazed,' he said, as he sat down again and adjusted his napkin upon his

knees. 'I do not see anything to prove that you are more than two or three and thirty.'

'I was forty years old on my last birthday—and I was still a student at Schwarzburg,' replied Rex quietly.

'You have a very fine action of the heart,' observed the doctor, 'I would not have thought it, but your age heals the wound in my vanity.'

Now it is a very singular fact that from that hour the great physician should have paid more attention to Greif and less to the venison and asparagus, but it is certainly true that his manner changed, as well as his conversation, and that he bestowed more care upon his patient than he had ever given to any sick man since he had become celebrated. Ever afterwards, he told his learned acquaintances that the only man he had ever met who gave promise of greatness was a quiet person who lived in the Black Forest.

Rex had satisfied himself, however, that the doctor knew a great deal, though he

had not a high opinion of medical science in general, and almost said so. Greif, nevertheless, continued to be very ill indeed, and his state seemed to go from bad to worse. Rex was anxious, and watched him and nursed him with unfailing care. He knew well enough what Greif had meant by the few words he had spoken after he was brought home, and he knew all that his cousin's action involved. His reflexions were not pleasant.

It seemed to him as though fate were about to solve the difficulty by cutting all the knots at once. If this terrible fever made an end of Greif, there would be an end also of the house of Greifenstein by the extinction of the last male descendant. Greif, the penniless and nameless orphan, would lie beside his father as Greif von Greifenstein, and the fortune would go in the ordinary course of the law to the Sigmundskrons, to whom it really belonged. But if Greif recovered and persisted in refusing to marry Hilda, the greatest injustice would be done to the widow and her

daughter. Rex's views of right would not be satisfied if the Sigmundskrons received only a part of the fortune which was legitimately theirs, and Rex thought with horror of the moment when he might be obliged to go to Greif and disclose the truth. He was a man of very strong principles, which were detached from any sort of moral belief, but it seemed as though his intelligence were conscious of its failing, in spite of all his reasoning, and were always trying to supply the lacuna by binding itself to its own rules, to which its faith had been transferred. He knew perfectly well that if Greif could not be persuaded that he was acting foolishly it would be necessary to reveal the secret. Rather than that Greif himself should be made to suffer what such a revelation implied, it would be almost better that he should die in his unconscious delirium. Human life, in Rex's opinion, was not worth much, unless it afforded a fair share of happiness, and he knew well enough that Greif could never recover from such a blow. The loss of

fortune would be nothing in comparison with the loss of name, and with the dishonour to his dead mother's memory. Rex knew what that meant, though even he had not been made to bear all that was in store for Greif in such a case.

In the dim room he looked at his brother's face. He had grown so much accustomed to the droning sound of his ceaseless ravings, as hardly to notice it when he was in the room, though it pursued him whenever he was alone. He watched Greif's pale features, and wondered what the result would be. If Greif died, the lonely man had nothing left to live for. Greif had come into his life, just when he was beginning to feel with advancing years that neither fortune nor science can fill the place of the human affections. As for the love of woman, Rex had never understood what it meant. He had entangled himself in more than one affair of little importance, partly from curiosity, partly out of vanity, but in his experience he had never found a companion in any woman, nor had he

ever known one whom he would not have left at a moment's notice for the sake of any one out of half a dozen occupations and amusements which pleased him better than lovemaking. To this singular absence of emotions he perhaps owed his youthful looks, at an age when many men are growing grey and most show signs of stress of weather. He had never cared for his father's society, first, because he had lacked all the early associations of childhood on which alone such affection is often based, and, secondly, because he had differed from him in all his ideas and tastes as soon as he had been able to think for himself. Their relations had always been amicable, for Rex was not a man, even when young, to quarrel easily over small matters, and old Rieseneck had sent him at an early age to Germany, supplying him very bountifully with money, in the belief that he ought to atone in every way for the injury done to his son by his own disgrace. Beyond a regular correspondence, which had never savoured much of ardent affection,

there had been nothing to unite the two during many years past. Then Rex had taken the trouble to find out his cousin, had liked him more and more, and had at last learned that he was not his cousin but his brother. Now, as he saw him lying there between life and death, he admitted to himself that he loved him, and that he took the trouble to remain alive merely for his sake. But for Greif, that fatal letter would have been enough to make him give it up.

In truth, the life which Rex had condescended to leave in himself did not promise well. The physician did his best, which was as good as any man's when he chose that it should be, but Greif was daily losing strength, and the inflammation of the brain showed no signs of disappearing. It is probable that if he had been thrown with any other companion than Rex, the great doctor would have shaken his head and would have announced that there was very little hope. But Rex acted upon him as a stimulant, and his impenetrable, stony

eyes made the physician feel as though his whole reputation were at stake. The latter even went to the length of sitting up all night when the patient was at his worst, a thing he had not done for many a long year, and probably never did again during his comfortable existence.

Greif was going to die. The doctor had very little doubt of it. In all his experience he had never known such an obstinate case of meningitis in a man so young and so strong. The grey morning dawned and found him and Rex standing upon each side of the bed that looked unnaturally white in the gloom. Still, Greif was alive, though his moaning had grown very faint, and his strength was almost gone. Rex held his breath every now and then, as the sound ceased, fearing lest every moment should be the last. The doctor tried to make out the time without carrying his watch to the night-light, failed and returned it to his pocket with a half-suppressed sigh. He had done all that he could, and yet Rex's stony eyes were fixed on him in the

early twilight, and his reputation was at stake. He knew that the thread might break at any moment, but he believed that if Greif lived until sunrise he would live until noon, and die about three o'clock in the day.

'Herr Rex,' he said quietly, 'I think you had better send for Frau von Sigmundskron, if she would wish to see him. You told me he had no other relation near.'

Rex's head fell forward upon his breast as though he had received a blow, though he had known all through the night that this morning might be the last, and the doctor had told him nothing unexpected. A moment later he left the room quietly. He was met by a servant before he had gone far.

'Tell Karl to put in the Trachener stallions and drive to Sigmundskron as fast as they can go. He must bring back the baroness before noon. Your master is dying.'

He would have turned away, but the man detained him with a question he did not hear at first.

'What did you say?' he asked.

'A messenger has just come from Sigmundskron to inquire,' the servant said.

'I will see him. Give the order to Karl quickly,' said Rex.

In the hall a queer-looking man was brought to him. He was one of those thin, wiry, dark and straight-haired men of the Forest who seem to belong to a race not German, whatever it may be. He wore patched leather breeches, from the side pocket of which protruded the horn handle of his long knife. His legs were bare, his shirt open at the neck, his waistcoat with silver buttons was flung carelessly over one shoulder, and a small fur cap was thrust back from his forehead, upon which a few drops of perspiration were visible. His small and piercing eyes met Rex's boldly.

'The baroness sent me to know how the young gentleman was,' he said, speaking in the Swabian dialect.

'Herr von Greifenstein is dying,' answered Rex gravely.

'Then I had better go and tell her so,'

said the man, calmly, though his face fell at the bad news. He was already turning away when Rex stopped him.

'Have you come on foot?' he asked, looking curiously at a fellow who could run over from Sigmundskron and go back almost without taking breath.

'Of course,' was the answer.

'Then you can go home in the carriage. I have just ordered it. Give him something to eat quickly,' he added, turning to the servant, 'before Karl is ready.'

'I shall be there before your carriage,' observed the man carelessly. 'Especially if you will give me a drink of cherry spirits.'

'Before the carriage?'

'Not if I stay here,' said the other. 'But I can beat your horses by half an hour at least.'

'What is your name?' asked Rex while the servant was gone for the drink.

'Wastei.'

'Sebastian, I suppose?'

The man shrugged his shoulders, as though to say that he did not care for such a

civilised appellation. Rex took out his purse and gave him a gold piece, a generosity elicited by his admiration for the fellow's powers.

'Take that, Wastei, and here is your liquor.'

Wastei nodded carelessly, slipped the money into his waistcoat pocket, drank a quarter of the bottle of cherry spirits at a draught, and touching his cap was out of the door before Rex could speak again.

'Did you ever see that fellow before?' Rex asked of the servant.

'No, sir,' the man answered rather stiffly. 'I am not from these parts.'

Rex returned to Greif's room with a heavy heart, and found the physician standing where he had left him, waiting for the sunrise. They both sat down in silence, watching the face of the dying man, and listening to his breathing. There was nothing to be done, save to try and make him swallow some nourishment once in a quarter of an hour.

The dawn brightened slowly, until a soft pink light was reflected from the snow out-

side upon the ceiling of the room. It was mid-winter still and the nights were long and the days short, the sun rising almost as late as possible and setting suddenly again when the day seemed only half over. When at last the level eastern rays shot into the chamber, Rex and the doctor rose and looked at their patient. He was breathing still, very faintly, and apparently without pain.

'There is a possibility still,' said Rex in a low voice.

The physician glanced at him, and suppressed a professional shrug of the shoulders.

'We shall see what happens at noon,' he answered, but the tone of his voice was sceptical.

To tell the truth, he believed that there was no longer any hope whatever, and so far as any such chance was concerned he would almost have risked going home at once. Nevertheless he determined to stay to the very last, partly because his reputation was at stake, partly out of curiosity to watch Rex at the supreme moment. He suspected that the latter was in some way

profoundly interested in the question of Greif's life, though he found it quite impossible to make sure whether his anxiety proceeded from affection or from some more selfish motive. For the present, however, he left Rex to himself and went to his own room to rest an hour or two.

The time passed very slowly. Rex's nerves were as firm as the rest of his singularly well-knit constitution, and he was never weary of fulfilling the mechanical duties of a nurse, which he had refused to relinquish, during twelve hours at least of each day, though he was obliged to give his place to an assistant during the remainder of the time.

In order not to be idle as he sat beside the bed, Rex drew figures and made calculations in his pocket-book. He seemed to derive considerable satisfaction from his occupation, for he looked more hopefully at Greif each time he raised his head, though the latter's condition showed no apparent change. His consolation was in reality only transitory, for when the clock

at last struck twelve and he laid his work definitely aside, it seemed to him that he had been dreaming and that the case was more desperate than ever. The physician returned and stood beside him, but he looked at Rex more often than at Greif. At last he laid his hand upon the younger man's arm and led him away from the bedside, towards the open window.

'Herr Rex, I would say a word to you. I firmly believe that your cousin will die in a few minutes.' He spoke in a whisper, and Rex bent his head, for he thought his companion was right.

'I have a theory,' continued the doctor, 'that people who are dying are far more conscious of what passes around them than is commonly supposed. It may be true or it may not. Let us at all events be careful of what we say to each other.'

Rex nodded gravely, and they returned to the side of the dying man. It was just mid-day, and Greif was lying on his back, with his eyes open. The physician bent down and laid his ear to the heart. When

he raised his head again, he looked about the room, somewhat nervously avoiding Rex's eyes. All at once his attention was arrested by the sound of running feet outside, and he glanced quickly at his companion, who had also heard the noise.

It was the supreme moment, for Greif's consciousness had returned. As often happens at the moment of death, a violent physical struggle began. The light returned to his eyes, and the strength to his limbs. He raised himself upon his hands, and sat up, while the doctor supported him with one arm, and with a quick movement put brandy to his lips. It was the work of an instant, and it all happened while Rex was crossing the room. Suddenly, as the doctor watched him, his eyes fixed themselves. In the next instant, he thought, their light would break; and the body he supported would collapse and fall back for ever. It was the last gasp. Then a ringing voice broke the silence, just as Rex had his hand upon the latch.

'I will, I tell you—he is mine!'

The door was flung wide open, and a woman entered the room. Rex had a strange impression of golden hair and gleaming eyes passing him like a flash, like the leap of a lioness springing to defend her young.

The doctor looked up in astonishment. Before he could help himself he was thrust ruthlessly aside, and Greif was in other arms than his. Hilda bent down as she held him. The fixed stare changed, while the doctor was craning his neck to see what would happen, but the light did not go out, nor did the pupils turn white and dead.

'Hilda! Hilda! Hilda!' His voice was faint but clear. One moment longer he gazed into her face and then sank quietly back upon her arm, with a smile upon his parted lips, his fingers seeking her hand until they lay quite still in hers. He was so quiet that Hilda was terrified. With a low and piteous moan she sank upon her knees beside the bed. It was a cry like nothing those present had ever heard. The

physician understood, and bent down to her.

'I think we had better be very quiet,' he said. 'You will frighten him.'

Hilda stared wildly into his face, and saw there an expression that transfixed her with astonishment. Slowly, as though not daring to face the sight, she turned her eyes towards Greif. There was a faint colour in his sunken cheeks, and he was breathing regularly. Hilda pressed her hands to her breast with all her might to smother the cry of joy that almost broke her heart.

The baroness was standing at the foot of the bed with Rex, unconscious of the tears that streamed from her eyes, her hands clasped before her as though in prayer. She looked like the figure of a sainted woman of old. As for Rex himself, he was trembling a little and was conscious that if he had attempted to speak he would not have heard his own voice. But otherwise his outward demeanour betrayed nothing of what was passing within him. He knew as well as the physician that Greif had

survived the most dangerous moment and that he would in all probability recover, and he knew that if Hilda's sudden entrance had not given a new impulse to the ebbing life, all would have been over by that time. For a few seconds he was scarcely conscious, though he looked calmer and colder than the doctor himself. He saw nothing but Greif, and his impression of Hilda's appearance was no clearer than it had been when she had rushed past him at the door with a gleam like a meteor.

Half an hour later, Greif was asleep. If all went well he might remain in this state for any length of time from twelve to twenty-four hours. Hilda had been prevailed upon to leave the room with her mother. The assistant took his place by the bedside, and Rex was with the doctor in the adjoining apartment.

'Science is a very pretty plaything,' said the great authority, stroking his grey beard thoughtfully. 'You know so much, Herr Rex, that you and I can afford to look at each other like the augurs and laugh, for

we certainly know nothing at all. I would have wagered my reputation against a hospital assistant's pay, that our friend had not sixty seconds of life in him, when that young lady appeared, like a fiery whirlwind, and caught him back to earth in the nick of time.'

'Science unfortunately does not dispose of such young ladies,' answered Rex with a smile. 'They are not in the pharmacopœia.'

'She is the most extraordinary one I ever saw,' observed the doctor. 'There is a vitality in her presence that affected me like electricity in a water bath. She has eyes like Sigmund the Volsung—perhaps he was her ancestor, since her name is Sigmundskron.'

'He is said to have been,' laughed Rex.

'I can quite believe it. Now I assure you that I thought it was all over. His heart has been very badly strained, and recently, and such a case of meningitis I have rarely seen. Of course he had the advantage of careful treatment; but you

may treat and treat as you like, if the heart is weak and nervous and strained, it may stop while the rest of the body has strength enough left to go on for weeks. I suppose they are engaged to be married?'

'Of course.'

'Did you hear her cry out that she would come in? Her mother's excellent propriety would have kept her out. But the young lady knew better than any of us how to save his life.'

Rex did not answer at once, and when he did, he turned the subject. Soon afterwards he went away, for he felt that he must be alone in order to think over what had happened and to regain his natural equanimity.

He had not the slightest doubt but that Greif would now recover quickly, and it seemed very probable that in that case he would no longer hesitate to marry Hilda. At the thought of her, Rex experienced a disagreeable sensation which even he could not understand at first. Hitherto, his chief preoccupation had been the mar-

riage, and scarcely an hour had passed, so long as he had hoped that Greif would live, in which he had not contrasted the happiness in store for his brother, if he took Hilda, with the misery he would have to encounter if he persisted in his quixotic determination.

And now that Rex had seen this girl, of whom he had heard and thought so much during the last ten days, he wished it were possible that Greif might remain Greif without her love. The thought was so selfish and seemed so unworthy in his own eyes that Rex concentrated his mind in an attempt to explain it.

In the first place, he felt a curious disappointment in the midst of his rejoicing over Greif's improvement. He himself had been untiring, faithful, by day and night, in watching over and taking care of the only human being he loved in the world. He wanted no man's gratitude, but he had longed earnestly for the satisfaction of saving Greif himself, of feeling that his first attempt at living for another, instead of for

his own individual advantage, had been crowned with success. He had spared no fatigue, and he had suffered every varying torture of anxiety and doubtful hope to the end. And yet, when the end was reached, Greif was dying. Neither Rex's care nor Rex's devotion could have kept him from slipping over the boundary. Then the door had opened, a woman had entered, and Greif had revived at the very moment of extinction. A bright-haired girl, with gleaming eyes, had done in one second what neither the physician's science nor Rex's loving watchfulness could have hoped to do. To a man who has cared little for women and has thought much of himself, it is humiliating to see a girl accomplish by her mere presence what all his intelligence and energy and forethought have failed to bring about.

Then again, Rex saw that in the future there was nothing for Greif but Hilda. Rex might be swept out of existence, but so long as Hilda remained, Greif would merely feel a passing regret for the man he believed to

be his cousin, a regret which Hilda's love would help him to outlive in a few weeks, or months, at the most. He hated himself for his selfishness, and realised that a new phase of his life had begun that day.

The impulses and impressions that beset him were only transitory and not likely to affect his conduct. His fondness for Greif was such that he would certainly rejoice honestly over his marriage and feel the most genuine hopes for his happiness. The only trace the passing hour would leave with him would be an unexpressed antipathy for Hilda. He knew, or he thought that he knew, how easily his systematic habits of thought could conquer such a tendency and reason it away into emptiness, and he went downstairs to make the acquaintance of his brother's future wife with the fullest determination to like her for Greif's sake, and never again to submit to a frame of mind which was contemptible if it was not utterly base. Could anything be more inconsistent than to let his joy at the prospect of his brother's recovery be clouded, because the

result was not wholly due to himself? Could anything be more absurdly foolish than to conceive a dislike for a woman whom Greif must marry to be saved from ruin and shame?

END OF VOL. II

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